

Young Klondike

STORIES OF A GOLD SEEKER.

Issued Semi-Monthly—By Subscription \$1.25 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York, N. Y., Post Office, March 15, 1898, by Frank Tousey.

No. 9.

NEW YORK, July 6, 1898.

Price 5 Cents.

"YOUNG KLONDIKE'S" JOURNEY TO JUNEAU;

—OR—
GUARDING A MILLION IN GOLD.



A slight sound heard further along the line of the bluff attracted Young Klondike's attention. He turned to look and saw a huge bear walking slowly toward him over the snow. Here was a good shot and a chance for fresh meat into the bargain.

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Young Klondike's Journey to Juneau; OR, GUARDING A MILLION IN GOLD.

BY AUTHOR OF YOUNG KLONDIKE.

CHAPTER I.

THAT LITTLE RUN-IN AT RINK RAPIDS.

"Do you see anything, Edith?"

"Not a thing, Ned."

"And yet we ought to see them by this time."

"So I should say, if they haven't given it up and gone back."

"We shall soon know."

"As soon as Dick and the Unknown return."

"Which will be when?"

"Ought to be before dark."

"I'm sure I hope so. It will soon be dark now."

"Suppose we get back to the camp. We may have trouble in working our way down there after dark."

A young man of nineteen stood at the top of the hill overlooking the famous "Rink Rapids" of Lewis river, one of the noted danger spots on the great Klondike trail.

By his side was a girl of about his own age and of more than usual beauty.

Both were comfortably clad and provided with every protection against the terrible winter climate of the new gold fields. Each carried a Winchester rifle, which seemed to indicate that they were looking out for trouble, as was indeed the case.

As they started to descend the hill Edith suddenly stopped and laid her hand upon her companion's arm.

"There's a stranger down there, Ned," she exclaimed.

She pointed down to the rapids, where there were great masses of ice piled up with an occasional glimpse of open water glittering in the last rays of the setting sun.

There were dog teams there, six of them, and three men standing guard over great boxes fastened upon sleds, from which the dogs had been unhitched.

Some of the animals were feeding, others were lying

down in the snow with their tongues lolling out as though it was a hot day instead of a very cold one.

Evidently the party had just completed a long run over the frozen bed of the Lewis river.

They were resting before beginning the next stage of their journey, Ned and Edith having improved the opportunity to ascend the hill and have a look at their surroundings, something very necessary, by the way, for the plan was to continue the journey as soon as the sun was down.

Now a winter journey in the dark along the great Juneau trail from Dawson City to the coast of Alaska is a very serious thing.

By far the greater number of Klondikers that journey over this dreaded trail is considered impossible even in the daytime during the cold months.

Only the boldest are willing to attempt it, for in trying to pass over this trail in winter many have lost their lives.

Fierce blizzards, bitter cold and the difficulty of carrying sufficient provisions have too often played dreadful havoc with travelers on the Juneau trail.

Besides these dangers there are wild and desperate men to be feared.

These are the "toughs" who always infest a newly opened mining region.

How they managed to subsist along the Juneau trail is one of those strange problems which nobody can solve, but there they are and always have been since the rush to the Klondike first began, and every now and again one hears of some party being attacked by these men.

Thus, seeing a stranger in their camp, it is not to be wondered that Ned and Edith made all possible haste down the hill.

A man standing fully six feet in his moccasins, dressed in a big bearskin coat and cap, stood near the boxes leaning on his rifle, talking to Charley Coons, one of the guards.

"Here's the boss, now," said Charley. "If you've got anything to say you'd better say it to him. I don't know nothing about his business; it's as much as I can do to attend to my own."

The Klondikers looked at Ned winking his left eye rapidly.

We took the trouble to specify the particular optic, for it would have been impossible for him to have winked his right eye, for somebody had gouged it out.

"Say, be you the boss of this here gold train?" he drawled. "You look pretty tarnation young."

"That's what I'm supposed to be," replied Ned. "What is it you want?"

"I want to go to Juneau."

"Indeed! Is there any reason why you shouldn't?"

"The best of reasons, boss. I hain't got no grub."

"And you'd like some of mine?"

"I would."

"We haven't got any more than we want for ourselves, but I expect my partner back pretty soon. I'll see what he says."

"Thank you. May I ax your name?"

"My name's Ned Golden."

"That so?"

"Yes."

"Then you must be the feller they call Young Klondike?"

"Yes."

"I've heard tell of you. Once you was just a poor clerk in New York, and now you are a millionaire three or four times over!"

"Not quite that."

"Pretty blame near it, if all I hear is true. Your partner's name is Dick Luckey?"

"That's right."

"He used to be just a poor clerk, too?"

"Yes; there's no disgrace in that, I hope?"

"Sure not, boss; I'm only axing for information. You're the firm of Golden & Luckey. You run a big mine up on El Dorado Creek?"

"Yes."

"And another in Owl Creek?"

"Yes."

"Others still on Golden Island and thereabouts? Up back of Forty Mile?"

"Yes."

"Thought I knowed you. Who's this young lady here?"

"You're asking a great many questions, it seems to me."

"Only for information, boss; only for information."

"There's no reason why we shouldn't tell him, Ned," laughed Edith, amused by the old fellow's quaint way of speaking. "My name is Edith Welton, if you want to know."

"Oh!" said the one-eyed man. "Edith Welton, is it? Anything to a Welton I once knew up at Dawson, I wonder? He went out to the South African gold diggings a while ago."

"You are speaking of my father."

"Oh, indeed! Then you are from San Francisco?"

"Yes."

"Been up here long?"

"She came when I did," interrupted Ned, who was in impatient under this fire of questions.

"Yes, and the steamer I took passage on was wrecked; my life was saved by my friend here, whom you call Klondike," laughed Edith, "and since then we have been together and we intend to keep together until we get to Juneau, and I'm one of the partners in Golden & Luckey. Now, is there anything else you want to know?"

"Sho! What a lot you've told me all to once," drawled the one-eyed man. "No, I don't know as I want to know anything else. I should say I was about done."

"And it's about time you were," growled Charley Coons. "Boss, I'm blamed if I'd answer all his questions, nothing but a tramp, anyhow, and he may be worse than I am!"

The last part of Charley Coons' remarks was whispered in Young Klondike's ear, but instead of taking offense, Ned only smiled.

"Pshaw! What harm can the poor old wretch do us," said Ned. "Get him a bite to eat while I find out his name."

But Ned had no chance to find out the name of the one-eyed stranger just then, any more than Charley Coons, to feed him, for at that moment a rifle shot rang out at the upper end of Rink Rapids.

Looking in the direction of the sound, Ned saw a man wearing a pair of big cavalry boots and a tall hat riding toward them.

He was accompanied by a handsome young fellow about Young Klondike's own age.

Both were looking back as they ran, and all at once they flung up their rifles and fired again.

"Trouble!" cried Edith.

"It's the toughs!" echoed Ned.

They seized their rifles and ran to meet their friend.

The one-eyed stranger ran with them, but Charley Coons and the guards obeyed Young Klondike's peremptory order to remain behind with the teams.

Before they had gone a dozen yards they caught sight of several men hurrying up the river bank.

Some were Alaskan Indians, of the treacherous Copper River mine tribe, and the others white toughs.

Ned knew only too well that they were all a gang of thieves together, and that prompt measures had to be adopted to drive them back.

"Stand your ground, Dick!" he shouted. "Hold on to your rifles, Ned."

"Take your stand behind them there boulders!" drawled the one-eyed stranger. "We'll give 'em rats, we will. We're willing to fight fer my grub."

Several huge boulders were scattered along the shore between Young Klondike and his friends.

Dick Luckey and the little man alluded to as "Unknown" took up their stand behind them, and in a moment Young Klondike, Edith and the one-eyed stranger were at their side.

"Are those the ones you were watching for?" demanded Ned.

"That's what they are," answered Dick.

"They don't seem disposed to fire?"

"No," replied the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, they came on us suddenly. I'd just given up the watch when they came out upon us. Say, Ned, who's your friend?"

The allusion was to the one-eyed stranger, of course.

Again Young Klondike just missed the chance of learning the old man's name, for at that moment the toughs opened fire on the boulders.

There was a general dodging behind the rocks, and the fire was returned.

For the next few minutes the skirmish was a hot one.

Then the enemy suddenly turned, ran down upon the ice, and crossing the Lewis river disappeared in the woods on the other side.

CHAPTER II.

HOW THE ONE-EYED MAN WAS LOST IN THE STORM.

"They have gone," said Edith.

"That's what," replied Dick. "Probably they didn't expect any such resistance. They are a hard gang, and lots of travelers over the Juneau trail have been robbed and murdered by them."

"I hope to gracious we see no more of them," said Ned, and he was just about to turn and thank the one-eyed stranger for his assistance, when the Unknown suddenly pounced upon the old fellow and seized him by both wrists.

"Ha, my man! By the Jumping Jeremiah, my man!" he cried. "Ye gods and little fishes, I've got you at last! Hold on, though! Wrong again! Beg your pardon, neighbor. I see that I've made a mistake."

Then the Unknown let go and burst into a loud laugh.

"Say, what in tarnation ails that feller? Is he a lunatic?" the stranger drawled out, looking very much surprised.

"Come now, Zed, none of that!" exclaimed Young Klondike. "Do you want to scare the poor fellow half to death? Remember, he ain't used to that funny business of yours."

Now, this was an old trick of the Unknown.

Young Klondike's friend was a detective by profession. A man who had traveled the world over and was still on his travels. All in the line of his business, he claimed.

He professed to be in search of a mysterious criminal whom he called "his man."

Who this man was or what crime he had committed nobody knew any more than they knew the name of the detective.

Here was another of the Unknown's peculiarities.

He had been a long time in company with Young Klondike and his friends now, but up to date had positively refused to identify himself with any other name than "Zed."

"Don't mind him," said Young Klondike. "This is only his play."

"Blamed rough play, and no sense into it," the one-eyed growled.

"Didn't I beg your pardon? What more do you want?" demanded the detective. "Who's his nibs, anyhow, Ned? What's he driving at here?"

"You can ask him if you want to find out," replied Young Klondike. "I don't know his name any more than I do yours."

"There, there! Don't harp on that old string. You know my name well enough. What's yours, neighbor?"

The Unknown put the question to the one-eyed man. Evidently he was anxious to turn the conversation away from himself.

"Wa'al, there hain't no mystery about my name, an' it's Ben Butters," drawled the one-eyed man. "I'm from Forty Mile, and I'm trying to work my way down to Juneau; that's all there is about me."

"Made your pile?" demanded the detective.

"No, lost it," replied Mr. Butters in his dry way.

"What you going to do; give it up?"

"Ya'as, give it up and go home."

"Why don't you try it again?" asked Ned. "I wouldn't be in quite such a big hurry to give it up if I were you."

"I've given it up already, boss; I'm old and tired. I don't think I want to do any more gold digging. Ain't like you, whose got a million or more in gold dust and nuggets packed in them there boxes."

"Say, who was telling you that fine yarn?" demanded the detective.

"Oh, I know."

"The deuce you do! There's such a thing as knowing too much sometimes. Look out you don't run against that snag."

Mr. Ben made no answer, and they all walked back to camp.

The next half hour was a busy one.

Dinner was served there by the rapids.

Everybody sat around on the boxes and drank hot coffee and eat ham sandwiches. Not much of a dinner, perhaps, but all they could expect under the circumstances.

Then the dogs were harnessed up again and the train prepared to move.

Meanwhile, no more had been seen of the toughs. Young Klondike was willing to hope that they might never meet them again.

But this was the second time they had been attacked since leaving Fort Selkirk, so there was no telling.

It looked very much as if the gold thieves—for the toughs were none else—were hovering on their trail and meant to keep it up until their purpose was accomplished.

This was something very unpleasant to think about.

The hint given by the one-eyed man as to the contents of the boxes was pretty close to the truth.

Whatever Mr. Ben Butters actually knew, it remained a fact that the boxes were filled with gold.

They carried a million and over in nuggets and dust.

Here was a fortune in itself.

It had been dug by Young Klondike and his party, and represented only a small part of his wealth.

The truth was, the firm of Golden & Luckey had become so rich it was a very difficult matter for them to know what to do with all their gold.

The branch bank of British North America, at Dawson, refused to take charge of any more than they now had.

Before the close of the season Young Klondike sent a

large amount down the Yukon River to St. Michaels, from which port it was taken to San Francisco by steamer.

Fortune having again been good to him, and another accumulation of the precious metal collecting on his hands, Ned determined to take it to Juneau himself.

This was partly on his own account and partly done to help the starving prospectors at Dawson City, Forty Mile, Fort Cudahy and other places in the Klondike country.

Thousands had rushed to the diggings during the late fall and food was very scarce, and prices away up out of sight.

Great suffering had been the result.

It was still going on, and there seemed to be no prospect of any substantial relief before spring.

One day a meeting was held at the mining exchange in Dawson City, and the richer mine owners offered a big bonus to any one who would attempt the journey to Juneau by way of the terrible Chilkoot pass to bring back provisions for the starving poor.

Two parties were organized and despatched, the expenses being paid by the heavy men of Dawson City, and as Young Klondike was one of the heaviest his share was the greatest, and yet on top of all that the brave young fellow suddenly made the offer to go himself, which was accepted by the committee amid a storm of cheers.

These were the circumstances which sent Young Klondike off on his journey to Juneau.

Every effort had been made to keep it as quiet as possible that a large amount of gold was going over with him, but the effort failed, of course, and before the party left Dawson City everybody knew it.

None but a brave man would have dared to undertake the terrible journey under these circumstances without a strong guard.

He was a fairly good shot himself, and so was Dick Luckey, while as for Edith she was a perfect expert with the rifle, and all hands, including the Unknown, had been through entirely too many stirring adventures since they came to the Klondike to feel the slightest fear.

The short Arctic day had already closed when, at a little past three o'clock in the afternoon, the dog train filed down upon the ice above Rink Rapids, and started for the "Five Fingers," as the group of islands lying a few miles beyond the rapids is called.

Ned and Dick rode on the first sled, Edith and the Unknown followed on the next one. Charley Coons and his men drove the other, and on the hindmost, seated upon the box of gold, Mr. Ben Butters rode.

"It looks as though it was going to snow before a great while," remarked Dick, as Ned cracked his whip above the dogs and sent the sled spinning over the ice.

"That's right. I can't see a star, and they were plenty enough a little while ago."

"What are you going to do if a storm comes up?"

"The best we can, same as we always do."

"We may have to go into camp."

"Don't mention it. The thought of going into camp on a night like this with the thermometer away down toward zero, and snow to boot, makes one sick."

"It ain't a very pleasant prospect, surely."

"Oh, it ain't so much on my own account, Dick. It's Edith I'm thinking of."

"That's the worst. Still, we mustn't borrow trouble. Say, Ned, I'm sorry that fellow Butters is along with us."

"So's the Unknown, and so am I for that matter; but how could it be helped?"

"I don't suppose it could, very well. Of course we couldn't turn him adrift."

"Certainly not. Did he give any explanation of how he happened to strike us?"

"He claims that he started to walk to Juneau and has been making his way along slowly ever since."

"It seems scarcely possible."

"I know it; but when a man is desperate he will attempt almost anything. There's no doubt about the poor fellow being almost starved—you could see that by the way he pitched into the grub."

"That's right. He did seem hungry. The Unknown don't trust him for a cent, though."

Nor in fact did Ned himself; although he had not said so, for he could not bear the thought of leaving the poor wretch behind them to starve, and that is what it would have amounted to if they had refused to allow him to accompany the train.

The first hour's ride was accomplished without any difficulty, and they covered more ground than Ned had dared to hope for.

They were still running along over the ice on Lewis river, doing the thirty-seven miles between Five Fingers and Big Salmon river, when it began to snow.

"Hello, there, Young Klondike!" shouted the Unknown, urging his dogs up alongside Ned's; "what do you think of this?"

"I don't like it, if you want to know," replied Ned; "but we've got to make the best of it, I suppose."

"We want to put it through to the relay house as fast as possible, and tie up there for the night."

"We've got to."

"If we don't we stand a good chance of being lost in the snow, and I needn't tell you that's no fun."

"Settled! The relay house it is," replied Ned, and he snapped his whip and was off again in advance of the Unknown, whose dogs, being more heavily loaded, made slower time.

From that on the storm seemed to steadily increase until at five o'clock the snow was so thick and so deep that it had become almost impossible for the dogs to proceed.

Matters were getting very serious. The poor brutes could no longer draw the sleds at a faster rate than a slow walk, sinking up to their middles at every step.

"What's to be done? We can go no further," Young Klondike said to Dick after a long silence.

"I'll be hanged if we haven't got about to the end of our rope."

"It looks like it. Hello there, Zed! What are we going to do?"

"Don't ask me. By the Jumping Jeremiah, I'm about ready to give up."

"Don't even hint at such a thing," said Edith. "How much further is it to the relay house, Charley?"

"Well, it can't be far," replied Charley. He was urging his dogs on alongside the rest. "I should say we might be within a mile of the relay house now."

"If we are still on the river," said the detective, "I ain't at all sure of that."

"Which we are," called out Ben Butters from his box. "I tell you, Young Klondike, we all stand a bang-up chance of freezing to death if we don't keep on the move, but we are on the river fast enough. Don't you see them banks ahead of us. That's the way the channel runs, right between them. If we could get up under the left bank there the snow wouldn't be so deep."

This was good logic, considering the way of the wind.

Ned saw that once under the bank they might be able to make a run for a considerable distance, perhaps a mile or more, without sending the dogs wallowing through the deep snow.

"That's the talk. We'll try it again," he declared, and, cracking his whip, he urged the dogs on.

The poor tired creatures seemed to appreciate the situation and did their best.

After a little they worked the sleds up under the bank and found the situation as they expected. It was comparatively easy going here.

"This is better, ever so much better," said the detective. "Now, if we can only strike the relay house we may escape."

But where was the relay house? Nobody seemed to know exactly.

Charley Coons, who had been over the ground twice before and was acting as guide, declared that he was not sure that they had not already passed it.

The snow had completely altered the appearance of everything, and even if it had been daylight it would have been difficult to determine their position, while as it was in the darkness, they could make nothing at all out of it.

But, of course, there was nothing for it but to keep on going, and that was what they did until all at once they came to a place where there was a sudden descent of snow ten feet down to a level stretch, where the snow laid spread out in one vast white sheet as far as the darkness would permit the eye to penetrate.

"Hold up!" cried Dick. "For heaven's sake, Ned, what is this?"

Ned reined in his dogs just in time to prevent the leaders going over the brink.

"What, this can't be the river!" he exclaimed. "There's no fall here!"

"What's the matter?" called Edith.

Ned shouted back, and his answer brought the Unknown and Charley Coons up on foot; they came wallowing through the snow, which was nearly up to their waists.

"This ain't the river," said the guide, emphatically. "I could almost have known that cuss was wrong, and now I know it's so. Probably we've been off the river for the last half hour, and where we are now, goodness knows."

"Call Ben Butters! Let's see what he's got to say about it," said Ned.

Now, as we have already stated, Mr. Ben Butters rode in

the box on the last sled, and so thick had the snow become that this sled could no longer be seen.

"Andy! Hey, Andy! Come on up here!" shouted Charley Coons to the driver of the last sled.

"I'm a-coming!" was the answer, when all at once there rang a dismal cry for help.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, what's that?" exclaimed the Unknown.

A shout from Andy came in answer.

"Man gone! Man gone!" he yelled.

They did not understand it until the last sled came up.

"That feller's gone!" cried Andy. "He must have tumbled off the sled. I never know'd it till I heard him holler. Gee whiz! There he goes again!"

"Help! Help! Save me! I shall perish in the snow!"

Once more the startling cry rang out through the gloom.

"By gracious, something has got to be done," cried Young Klondike. "We can't leave the poor fellow to perish so."

"It's my opinion we've got all we want to do to take care of ourselves," declared the Unknown. "Still, I suppose we've got to go back. You'd never rest quiet if we didn't, Young Klondike."

"Oh, we must go," said Edith. "It would be barbarous to leave the poor fellow behind us."

"How in the world did he come to fall off the box, Andy?" asked Charley Coons.

Andy's idea was that the one-eyed man had been overcome with the cold, which seemed likely enough. Lanterns were now lighted, and Ned and the Unknown started back.

It was almost a hopeless task—more so than any one can imagine who has not been in a similar situation.

Meanwhile, Edith and Dick, with the help of Charley Coons and the others, were trying to make out what was best to do for their own safety—a very serious problem as matters stood.

When Ned and the Unknown got back they reported entire failure.

"It's no use. We could find nothing of the poor wretch," said Young Klondike. "We called and called, but could get no answer. There can't be any doubt that he has tumbled into some drift and is buried there. I'm afraid by this time he's past all help."

And a feeling of deep gloom settled down upon all the party.

It was terrible to think of the poor wretch dying there in the snow.

How soon it might be their own fate no one could tell, for the snow was coming down faster than ever, and neither Young Klondike nor any of his followers had the least idea which way to go.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THE PHANTOM DOG TEAM WENT DOWN OVER THE BLUFF.

It is a fearful thing to be overtaken in a snow storm in Alaska.

Although Young Klondike had tried hard to keep up his own courage for the sake of the rest, he found it hard work, for he fully realized what it all meant.

Something had to be done, and that right away, or there was no help for them.

The suggestion came from Edith which undoubtedly saved them from death.

"We can't be far away from the river," she exclaimed. "Let's divide; part of us go to the right and part to the left, and the one who strikes the bank first fire a shot."

"With the idea of going into camp under the shelter of the bank?" Ned asked.

"Yes; that is if we can find no better shelter."

"We'll do it. We've got to do something, and it may as well be that as anything else."

So Ned and Dick started off in one direction and Edith and the Unknown took the other.

Charley Coons and the men remained with the dog teams.

The agreement was that a shot should be fired every five minutes by each party, Charley Coons always firing twice.

Failing to hear Charley's double signal either party was to instantly return.

Ned and Dick plodded on wearily through the snow trying to penetrate the gloom. It was hard work, for their snowshoes were packed in the baggage hamper, and it was impossible to get at them.

Before they had signaled three times Ned began to feel that to go much further was to risk their lives, for it was more than doubtful if they would be able to get back to the sleds.

"It won't do, Dick; first thing we know we'll be stuck," he said. "I think we'd better turn back now."

"Do you feel awfully worried, Ned?"

"It looks mighty dubious."

"Suppose we never get back?"

"Don't say it! While we're alive I shall hope and—hold on! What's that big black thing on ahead there?"

"Rocks!" cried Dick.

"Then that means shelter. Push ahead."

"Time's up! We must signal again."

Dick fired.

Immediately the two answering shots were heard.

Then, after a few seconds' wait, another shot rang out far in the distance.

"That's Edith," said Ned. "Well, we're all alive yet, that's some comfort. Pitch in, Dick. We'll find what those rocks are."

They toiled on. In a few minutes the rocks stood out plainly before them. It was a bluff some thirty feet high. Behind they could see other rocks rising. At a little distance ahead was a low black object.

Here they were sheltered from the wind and the ground was comparatively clear of snow.

"This is all right!" cried Young Klondike joyfully. "We can camp here with perfect safety. I've no doubt that we can find plenty of wood to build a fire, too, if we can only get our snowshoes. Shall we start back?"

"I want to see what that black thing is first," said Dick.

"A big boulder probably."

"Like enough. Still, we must make sure."

"We can do that after we all get here, Dick."

"No; let's do it now, Ned. I feel just as though I must know."

It was as lucky a move as Dick ever made, for before they had covered half the distance they saw that the black object, instead of being a big rock, was a log hut, comfortably built, with a door and two windows, a fireplace and plenty of wood collected, and to cap all, there was a shelter for the dogs outside.

"Hooray! The relay house!" cried Ned.

"That's what it is," replied Dick. "Did I make any mistake? I guess not! We're all safe now."

Two shots rang out.

Ned hastened to answer.

Listening, the signal from Edith was heard.

"We've crossed the river and didn't know it," said Young Klondike. "Build up a roaring fire here, Dick. I'll get back and bring the whole party over."

Back went Ned with the good news.

"I knew we couldn't be far from it," declared Charley Coons. "Call in the old man and Miss Welton and we'll start right along."

Ned fired three shots, which was the signal for return.

It seemed an interminable time before Edith and the Unknown came in, but they were back at last reporting no find on their side.

"I was just giving it up when I heard your shots," said the detective. "It's my opinion one might go on forever on that side and never strike shelter. It takes Dick to make the lucky strike."

"And who says there's nothing in a name?" cried Edith. "Let's hurry to the hut. I suppose there is no use in looking any further for that poor fellow. I only wish there was."

When they reached the hut they found that Dick had a roaring fire on the hearth, and everything was warm and comfortable.

The dogs were unharnessed and put in the shed, and the boxes of gold carried inside the hut.

Then supper was served and everyone would have had a jolly time if it had not been for the thought of the wretched Mr. Butters, whose sad fate set them all to reflecting what their own might yet be.

About nine o'clock Ned went outside to look at the weather.

It had almost stopped snowing, and the wind had entirely died away.

Ned made up his mind that it was going to clear off, and by midnight he knew that he was right, for then the stars came out and the thermometer fell rapidly. By two o'clock the glass marked twenty below zero, and at half-past three when the Unknown waked Ned up to take his turn on the watch, it was twenty-five.

Dick, who had been called too, threw an armful of wood upon the fire, and the boys sat down to finish out the night the best they could, the Unknown and Charley Coons turning into the bunks. The man Andy was on the watch outside in the shed, so bundled up as to be almost unrecognizable.

"This is going to block us in here, I'm afraid," remarked

Ned. "I don't see how we are going ahead through this now."

"Don't you fret," replied Dick. "Just as soon as it's daylight we shall be able to find the river easy enough, and then the snow will be so packed down that the sleds will go over it like greased lightning."

"I wish I thought so."

"You'll find it so; be sure of it."

"If it is we ought to make good time to-morrow."

"Let's go out and have a look. I want to see how the thermometer stands now."

Dick had no objection to offer, and they went outside.

The stars were shining overhead with a brilliancy only to be seen in the Arctic regions. It was perfectly still, the silence being almost awe-inspiring.

As they stood there looking up at the myriad of twinkling points in the heavens, there was a burst of flame in the north.

Heavy tongues of greenish light shot up heavenward; then suddenly changing form and gathering in one great mass they seemed to descend from the vast starry dome like a curtain drawn into innumerable folds.

"The moon!" cried Young Klondike. "Dick, was there ever anything so beautiful!"

"It's immense! Edith made me promise to wake her up. I ever saw such an aurora as this and she happened to be asleep."

"It's a shame to disturb her."

"But I must. I gave my promise. Why, it's as bright as day!"

"Better do it, then. If we could only get up on the rocks there we could get a better view of it. I'd like to have a look at the whole business, and here we can only see part."

"There wouldn't be any trouble in getting up," said Dick as he went back into the hut.

After he had gone Ned started to go into the shed to see how the dogs and Andy were getting on.

It might have saved him lots of trouble if he had carried out that idea, but as it happened something turned him off, and from that moment Andy and the dogs went out of his head.

A slight sound heard further along the line of the bluff attracted Young Klondike's attention. He turned to look and saw a huge bear walking slowly toward him over the snow.

Here was a good shot and a chance for fresh meat into the bargain.

Ned seized his rifle, which was leaning against the hut, and, drawing a bead on the bear, fired.

The result was not altogether satisfactory.

The bear stopped, gave a ferocious growl and then turning went limping away, leaving a trail of blood behind him in the snow.

"By gracious, I must finish that fellow!" thought Ned, forgetting all about the dogs; and off he started after the wounded bear.

But the bear developed greater speed than he expected. Running away, it was hard to get a shot at a vital spot, and

Ned knew that to shoot him from behind would do no good at all.

So he ran on, coming closer and closer as the bear's strength began to fail.

Evidently the poor animal realized the situation, for it suddenly stopped running, and turning, rose upon its hind legs and stood facing Ned.

Here was the chance. Another shot and the bear's business was settled.

Over it went in the snow just as Edith and Dick came hurrying up.

"Good shot, Ned!" cried Edith. "That will give us all the fresh meat we want for days to come."

"That's what I'm driving at," replied Ned triumphantly. "What do you think of our aurora?"

"It's splendid! I never saw anything to equal it."

"Worth being waked up to look at?" asked Dick.

"Indeed it is. Shall we skin the bear now, Ned? I don't feel like sleeping any more to-night."

"Oh, let it be for a little while. I don't believe there are any wolves to bother it. Let's go up on the bluff and have a look."

"At the aurora? I suppose we can see it better from there."

"At everything. I want to find out where we are, and we won't have a better chance till after sunrise, which won't be for hours yet."

Dick had no objection to offer, and as the rocks were comparatively bare of snow here, and not too steep to be easily climbed, they started right off.

It was now about four o'clock, and it must be remembered that in Alaska one gets used to traveling about at night; if it wasn't so, there would not be much traveling done, the hours of daylight are so short.

So they climbed up to the top of the bluff and thought nothing of it, and when they came to view the aurora from this height it was beautiful beyond all description. They stood looking at it for many minutes, no one speaking a word.

"Wonderful!" cried Edith at last. "There never was anything so beautiful. Why some of those dark days last week were hardly any lighter than this."

"Mighty little," replied Ned. "I can see a mile along the top of the bluff at least."

It was really amazing how far they could see. As far as the eye could reach the flat shelf which formed the top of the bluff stretched out before them. It's width was some hundred feet or more, and behind it the mountain rose to a great height above their heads.

Now, while Young Klondike stood there looking a very irregular thing occurred.

At no great distance away, a little further than where the bluff overhung the hut, two white dogs suddenly came into view, trotting along over the snow.

They were followed by six others, and then came a sled flying toward Young Klondike's party with great rapidity.

On the sled four men were seated, including the driver, all clothed in white furs, which looked as if it might be the skin of a polar bear.

"Great heavens! What's that?" cried Ned. "Who can those people be?"

"A phantom sleigh!" exclaimed Dick.

"I'd rather it would be a phantom sled than a real one up here, Dick. We don't want any visitors at the hut. Remember the millions in gold."

"Look! Look!" cried Edith. "They are driving right over the edge of the bluff. Are they mad?"

It was very startling. Almost enough to make one think that if such a thing as a phantom sled was possible, Dick might be right.

All at once the driver turned his dogs toward the edge of the bluff.

Over they went, dragging the sled after them.

It seemed to rise almost to the perpendicular as it went over the edge, but the silent forms seated upon it never moved.

It all happened in a moment, and then the bluff was deserted, and the aurora flashed down only upon Young Klondike and his friends.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOSS OF THE GOLD.

For a moment Ned, Dick and Edith just stood there looking at each other without uttering a word.

"Amazing!" cried Edith, breaking the silence at last. "Ned, what does it mean?"

"That we've got to hustle!" cried Ned. "There's going to be trouble down at the hut."

"Let's get over there," said Dick. "If they can get the sled down we can go, too."

"I'm not so sure."

"But I am, though. Don't you fret. We can make it. There's no more of any consequence here and we can cover the ground in five minutes."

It seemed plausible enough, but Young Klondike never made a greater mistake.

They all started off on the run for the place where the sled had been seen, but when they reached it they saw plainly enough that they were not going to be able to get down.

The snow overhung the rocks here to such an extent that there was absolutely no footing.

Yet there were the tracks. The sled had gone right over into the drift.

"It beats everything," said Dick. "They went down there, but I'll be blest if I feel like trying it."

"It ain't safe to try it," replied Ned. "If we had snow shoes we might think of it, but even then it would be a risk."

They stood there for a moment looking at each other, and then all seemed to realize that the only thing to do was to go down by the way they had come up.

Off they started on a run, and had almost reached the place, when suddenly a shot rang out below the bluff.

"Heavens! They are at it!" cried Ned. "It's an attack on the hut!"

There was another shot then, and another, and afterward all was still.

Alarmed! Well, naturally, they were all that, but Ned might have taken a little more care.

In his haste he missed his footing and went tumbling down into a big drift up to his neck, scaring Dick and Edith terribly, and a good ten minutes was wasted in getting him out.

All this time not a sound had reached their ears from the direction of the hut.

"It's all my fault!" groaned Ned, as he shook off the snow. "If anything desperate has been done there I shall have no one but myself to blame."

"Come on! Come on!" cried Dick. "There's something wrong. I have it. We ought to have gone up on the bluff."

They hurried on toward the relay house, but before they reached it they saw four dog teams flying off under the aurora.

"Look! Look!" cried Ned, who first caught sight of them. "Our teams, Dick!"

"Sure they are."

"The forward ain't; it's the phantom sled," declared Edith.

"You're right! I see the white dogs. They are loaded down, too."

"The gold!"

"I'm afraid."

"Then it means treachery," declared Dick. "Can any of our men be in it?"

They ran on. The door of the hut stood wide open and so was the shed door.

It began to look as though the worst might have happened.

All around the hut the snow was trampled down. They could see where the boxes had been thrown when they were passed out of the hut.

Every box was missing, the hut was deserted and so was the shed.

Even the provisions had been carried off.

By this time the dog teams had disappeared in the distance, and the prospect of their ever being seen again looked very slim.

Ned leaned against the door post in silence. Dick and Edith peered into the deserted bunks without a word.

"It's a bad business, and no mistake," groaned Dick at last. "Ned, what in the world are we going to do?"

"Not give up in despair, that's certain. The only thing that worries me is about the Unknown."

"Same here. It seems strange to think so little of a million in gold, but I'd cheerfully give my share of it just to have one sight of the Unknown's old plug hat now."

"And wouldn't I? I rather guess yes! They've all gone back on us, Dick. It seems as though it was just impossible to get straight, honest men in Dawson. I'm afraid Charles Coons is at the bottom of this."

"I don't believe one word of it," said Edith, very decidedly. "Mr. Coons is an honest man, and I'm sure of it. As for Andy and Tom I wouldn't say so much, but it ain't possible they could have known we were going to stop here and warned their friends to be on the lookout for us."

"Don't you be so sure. This is the relay house, remem-

er, and almost every one puts in a night here in the journey to Juneau. Besides, there's the one-eyed man."

"You don't think he could have been in with the gang—that he's at the bottom of this?"

"It wouldn't surprise me a bit. See, here's where the ed came down over the bluff. Nothing hard about it when you come to look. We might have done the same if we had only had courage enough to take the jump into the first rift."

Talk and speculation did not amount to much, however, and Young Klondike being the kind to act rather than talk, he soon began to suggest ways of getting out of the difficulty.

Of course, it was useless to think of following the sleds they were. Even their snowshoes were gone with the st, and without snowshoes it would be next to impossible make any progress on foot.

"I'll tell you what it is," said Ned, suddenly. "We want find out where those fellows came from. More than likely they've left something behind them to tell who they are."

"Will it do us any good to know?" groaned Dick. "Everything is lost, and it makes precious little difference who has stolen it, as far as I can see."

"Ned's right. Let's go up on the bluff again," said Edith. "We may strike something; at least we can do nothing here."

They started off and climbed up the rocks to the top of the bluff.

It was lighter than ever now, for in addition to the rora the moon had come out, and with the aid of a good light glass it was possible to see for miles around.

Ned had just such a glass, which he always carried with him, for winter travel in Alaska is both difficult and dangerous, and one can never tell what is going to happen.

As he looked off upon the snow-white stretch which lay low the bluff he could get a glimpse of the dog teams moving in a southeasterly direction.

"There they are," cried Edith, catch sight of them at the same moment.

"That's what's the matter! I see them," replied Ned. "Gracious, they are as plain as day! Hello! There's the unknown. Hit him again! That's the talk! Hurray for Ned! Go it; go it! They'll shoot him! No they won't! Here, he's got the start! If he can only hold it. Oh, couldn't I give a lot to be there!"

Now, any one might have been excused for thinking that Ned had suddenly taken leave of his senses the way he raved then. But what he saw through the glass was enough to excite any one. As his eyes rested upon the last of the four sleds he caught sight of the Unknown. The detective suddenly rose up from the pile of boxes and brought his fist down upon the driver's head, jamming the fellow's face over his eyes and, seizing him by the shoulders he pushed the man off the sled, tumbled into his place, caught the lines and went whirling away, following by a shower of shots. Fortunately for the brave detective, he was protected by the boxes, and none of them seemed to tell.

"I see him! I see him!" cried Dick, as Ned hurriedly explained what had happened.

"He's coming this way," said Edith. "They ain't following him, either."

"No, no! See, he turns and fires back. Ah! that shot told. One of them went off the forward sled. They are going to let him alone now."

"He's making for the relay house. We want to go and meet him!" cried Dick. "By gracious, those fellows made the mistake of a lifetime when they carried the Unknown away with them. Probably they realize it now."

There was no mistake made in getting down off the bluffs, though.

When they reached the level they could see nothing of the sled.

But they hurried off through the snow in the direction from which they knew it was coming.

"There he comes!" cried Edith, suddenly, and she threw up her rifle and followed.

As the shot came echoing back from the hills, Ned and Dick caught sight of the Unknown, looking like Santa Claus with a plug hat on, driving his dogs over the snow.

He saw the little party and rounded up alongside of them a moment later.

"Oh, here you are!" he cried. "Come out to meet me, eh? By the Jumping Jeremiah, I've had a hard time of it. We've lost a million in gold."

CHAPTER V.

OFF ON THE GOLD ROBBERS' TRAIL.

"Get your breath before you try to talk. It can't make matters any worse to help us waiting a few moments," said Young Klondike, for the Unknown was gasping like a fish out of water between each word.

"Well, I am out of breath!" he exclaimed. "It's the excitement, I guess. Look here. I've got off with all the grub, and that's one thing."

Then Ned saw that it was the boxes containing the provisions and other belongings of the party which the Unknown had brought back with him. There was none of the gold on the sled.

"Are they following you?" he demanded.

"Yes—no—I don't know, and I don't much care. Oh, the scoundrels! Next time we start on the journey to Juneau I won't trust my own brother! I might have known that no good luck would come of picking up a one-eyed man."

"Do pull yourself together," cried Dick. "What's the one-eyed man got to do with this?"

"Everything to do with it. He's the head and front of the whole business! Dead, eh? Not a bit of it! Hurt in the snow, eh? Well, I guess not! Calling for help, eh? Making us risk our lives trying to find him? Don't you forget it, that was only a big bluff."

"Tell us all about it, Zed," said Edith. "Will you talk now or do we want to start right off after them and talk as you go."

"There ain't much use in starting after them, and that's a fact," said the detective dismally; "but I supposed that was what you'd want to do."

"You don't mean to let the gold go?" asked Ned. "Surely you don't mean that?"

"No, no, no! Ye gods and little fishes. No! I was only thinking."

"Of what?"

"They are going to Juneau with that gold, Ned!"

"So!"

"Yes, sir. I overheard them talking in French. They didn't know that I could understand their lingo; but all the same I could."

"Then we are going to follow."

"Of course, of course. I don't dispute that, but we'd take it easy. You see these dogs are pretty well tuckered out. I slugged that scoundrel of an Andy over the head, tumbled him off the sled and ran away with the blooming team. By the Jumping Jeremiah, wasn't he thunder-struck! I came mighty near being bullet struck, too, but I managed to get away from them in the end."

"Yes, I saw it all," replied Ned.

"You did, like nothing. That's all nonsense."

"No it ain't. We were on the bluff. I had my night glass—what more do you want?"

"Well, it does beat all how them night glasses do show up things in the dark; but as I was saying—"

"Say it on the sled. We want to start off on the trail of them gold robbers, and we don't want to lose any time."

"All aboard then! Here we are off for Juneau! If we come up with the gold robbers, heaven help them—that's all I've got to say."

The boys and Edith had already taken their places on the load, and the Unknown, giving his whip a flourish, started the dogs.

It requires an expert to drive a dog team well, but the Unknown had enjoyed considerable practice during the preceding winter, and was able to manage them in first class shape.

"Now," said Ned, "for gracious sake tell us how all this happened. Here we've been talking for the last five minutes and don't know yet whether all our men have turned traitors or not."

"Andy and Tom have, but not Charley Coons," replied the detective. "You see Charley and I were sleeping away peacefully, trusting to a certain fellow who is generally called Young Klondike to keep guard over us, when—"

"Hold on there!" broke in Ned. "Am I to blame for this?"

"Well, what do you say yourself, dear boy? Were you on the watch?"

"No! It is all my fault."

"Ah! Your sense of justice is keen, noble youth! I knew you'd admit the charge. Where were you when the enemy came down upon us, may I ask?"

"Well, we were up on the bluff looking at the aurora. I had just shot a bear and—"

"Just shot a bear? Where is it? Here we want everything in the shape of fresh meat we can get, and you are calmly talking of leaving a bear behind us."

"Too late now. We can't go back, so suppose you go on?"

"With my story?"

"And the sled."

"First give me time to forgive you for your negligence."

"How long will it take? I'm to blame—I own it."

"You're forgiven already, then, although you don't deserve it. As I was saying, Charley and I were suddenly awakened by four men, who came bursting into the hut. One was Andy and the other was Tom, and the other was that double dashed, one-eyed son of a Butters, and the other—that's the last—might have been taken for a ghost for he had on a big white bearskin coat and a white fur cap and it was he that covered me with his rifle, gol bust him! I only wish I had him here now, and the four other white coats who were waiting outside to steal our gold."

The Unknown had worked himself up into a regular rage. "You ought to thank them for not killing you," said Dick.

"Blamed if I know why they didn't. They tied up Charley and me, and wouldn't say a word as to what they meant to do with us. I fixed 'em, though! One of them has got one of my bullets to remember me by. I wish I'd been able to do more."

"Do you think it was the same gang that attacked us below?" asked Ned.

"Part of them—not the same men though. That attack was only a blind. They saw the storm coming and knew we'd have to stop at the relay house. That one-eyed snooze was the spy sent ahead to make sure that we did it. He fooled us fine, and now we are in the worst kind of way."

Thus it was all explained, and Young Klondike realized how unwise they had been to undertake the journey to Juneau with so small a guard.

Soon the sun rose and the remainder of that day was spent in following the gold robbers' trail.

There was no difficulty in keeping on it—the trail was plain enough. The increasing cold had hardened up the snow somewhat, and it was an easy matter for the dogs to drag the sled along.

There was no difficulty in striking the Juneau trail either for the trail of the robbers followed it closely.

No doubt their intention was to go to Juneau, for the tracks kept along the bed of the Lewis river.

But it proved to be one thing to strike the trail of the gold robbers and another to come up with them. Day succeeded day, and they saw no sign of them, but there was always the trail in the snow.

It was splendid weather—not too cold for travel and always clear.

Having their provisions, there was no suffering from hunger, and, besides, what they carried, Edith made some good shots. A bear was killed on the first day, a moose on the second. They could easily have shot two other bears on the third, but as it was impossible to carry any more meat they let them go.

During this long run, unbroken by adventure, Young Klondike's party cleared the Lewis river, Thirty-Mile river, Lake Le Barge and made the famous White Horse rapids.

Once they stopped over night at a relay house, but on the other two nights, this not being convenient, they encamped under the shelter of rocks and slept rolled up in the blankets on the snow.

This may seem a terrible hardship, and so it would be to many, but it was not so to Young Klondike's party. They had become well used to that sort of thing.

Matters now began to look pretty dubious, so far as the recovery of the gold was concerned.

All this time they had not seen a living soul, and the only satisfaction they had was in being able to continue on the trail of the gold robbers. They found the places where they had encamped, too, but until the night they reached White Horse rapids the ashes of their fires were always cold, and it was impossible to determine how far they were ahead of them, but that night brought a change.

Our travelers had almost reached the rapids, when, coming suddenly to a place where a great ledge of rocks overhung the river, they saw the trail suddenly turn in under the rocks.

"Another camp!" cried Ned, who was on the watch.

"That's what's the matter," said Dick. "Say, ain't that smoke?"

"Looks mighty like it!" said the Unknown. "Have we struck a hot trail at last?"

"Hot coals!" laughed Ned.

"By the Jumping Jeremiah, we need something hot to encourage us. If it hadn't been for Edith's cheerfulness I'd have given up in despair long ago."

"No, you wouldn't," said Edith. "You are the most cheerful of all of us. Here's their fire! See, the coals are red hot still, and they can't be long gone."

It was the most encouraging thing they had seen in days, but there was something of mystery about it, too.

Why the robbers should have abandoned their camp just at dark Ned could not understand.

"Scared off; that's what!" declared the Unknown.

"By Indians!" suggested Dick.

"Who else could it be?"

"'Tain't likely there's any other party of miners but ourselves on the Juneau trail."

It was odd how the answer came.

The words were scarcely spoken, when Edith espied a team of eight dogs coming toward them over the frozen rapids.

They were drawing a heavily loaded sled, and there were three others behind it.

"The gold robbers!" gasped Dick. "They are coming back!"

It was not altogether clear that night, and consequently not easy to see just what sort of men rode on the sleds, but there seemed to be quite a crowd of them, and Ned realized at once that they could not be the gold robbers, and this made it equally certain that it was a party going into the Klondike from Juneau.

"We can show ourselves, safely," he declared. "They are only a lot of prospectors. There is nothing to fear."

They were already off the sled, and as the dog train drew

near they stood out in full view, Ned lighting a lantern and waving it before them.

"Hello! Hello! Hello!" shouted the driver of the first team, cracking his whip and urging his dogs on at full speed.

"Hello! Hello! Hello!" shouted the Unknown in his foghorn voice.

It is a great thing to meet travelers on the Juneau trail.

Soon the sleds came up, and Ned immediately recognized old Dan Dubois, a noted French-Canadian dog driver, known to everyone in Dawson City as the most daring man on the Klondike.

"Why, why, why! Is it you, Young Klondike?" he exclaimed. "By gracious! you're a wonder! Do you mean to say that you've undertaken the winter journey to Juneau without a guide?"

They shook hands heartily, for Ned knew old Dan perfectly well.

Then the men crowded off the sleds. They were all "ten-derfeet," new-comers in the gold diggings, and a fine stalwart lot of fellows they were, too, for the most part old Californian miners, well used to roughing it. No others would have dared to undertake the winter journey to Dawson City, and as many of them had heard of Young Klondike they crowded around him, all eager to make the acquaintance of the young gold king and his friends.

"Not a word about our loss," Ned said positively before they came up, and so not a word was said until the first talk was all over, then Young Klondike and Dick drew Dan Dubois aside and told him all.

"Did you meet such a party?" was his eager question.

"No, sir!" was the disappointing answer. "We've seen no one in two days, and then it was only a band of Cop-permine Indians."

Ned took Dan a little way back and showed him the trail.

The old habitant—as the French-Canadians are called—shook his head.

"There are no tracks beyond the canyon," he declared.

"Where did you first strike them?"

"Just as I was coming through the canyon," was the reply. "I saw them then and wondered what they meant. I was just going to ask you when you spoke."

"Then they must have gone up into the mountains."

"It looks like it. You'd better give it up, sir."

"Give up a million? Not much. Don't some of your party want to join me in hunting down these robbers? I'll pay well."

"I don't believe you can persuade one of them. The risk is too great. You see they've all got their baggage to look after and if they were to leave me there would be nothing left for them to do but to go back to Juneau even in case you succeeded; but you can try it and see what they say."

Ned did try it, and the result was just as old Dan Dubois had predicted.

Money was no inducement. It was impossible to persuade any of the prospectors to give up their journey to Dawson and go to hunting gold robbers.

The plan was therefore abandoned.

Dan Dubois then announced his intention of going into camp for the night there under the rocks.

"Shall we stay with them or push ahead?" was the question Young Klondike put to Dick, Edith and the Unknown.

"Go on," said Dick.

"By all means," added Edith.

"Strike while the iron is hot—I mean while the coals are hot," declared the Unknown.

That settled it.

Bidding the prospectors good-by, they drove off into the canyon, Ned keeping a close watch on the gold robbers' trail.

CAPTER VI.

THE ATTACK ON THE ROBBERS' CAMP.

"It was no easy matter to follow the trail once they entered the canyon.

Here great walls of rock towered on either side of them, and the snow was packed down so hard on the frozen river bed that it would have been difficult to have detected the trail even in the daytime, and now it was dark and the faint impressions left by the dogs' feet and the sled runners were crossed and recrossed by the trail of old Dan Dubois' party, which added greatly to the difficulty.

Still the trail was there, and Ned was just beginning to think that the habitant had been mistaken when all at once it disappeared.

"Gone!" cried the Unknown, who was watching out on the other side.

"I know it," replied Ned. "It ended back there by that big white rock."

"Just beyond it. I didn't see it after we passed the rock."

They dismounted and lighted the lantern.

Dick remained by the dogs and the others went back to search for the trail.

Soon they found it. The tracks seemed to end abruptly by the rock, but then there was ice here. From the canyon walls running water had evidently fallen since the snow, caused by some bursting spring, no doubt. The water had frozen and formed a crust and this extended almost to where they had stopped.

Ned saw at once that there was no telling exactly where the trail disappeared within a space of a hundred yards or more.

Then followed a long and unavailing search for some clue to the mystery.

"I think," said Edith, "that we shall have to give it up until daylight. Of course we don't want to go on, and we haven't light enough here to feel sure that we have looked thoroughly.

"We may as well go back to old Dan's camp under the ledge there," said the Unknown. "We won't find a better place. They'll have a fire and it will be warm and comfortable there."

They returned soon afterward and were very pleasantly received.

The evening was spent in talking about the Klondike and its wonderful gold mines.

All the prospectors were anxious for information, and they put all sorts of questions to the boys and listened to the marvelous tales of the Unknown, who doubled the value of every find they had made.

At about 8 o'clock almost all rolled themselves in their blankets and lay down to sleep under the shelter of the rocks.

Edith and Dick were among the number, but Ned was not ready for bed then, and remained talking to a young prospector, who was doing guard duty until half past 10. Just as he made up his mind to try for a little sleep he suddenly missed the Unknown.

He was not among the sleepers, nor was he to be found among the dog teams, nor anywhere else.

Ned was perplexed, but not as much as he might have been, for this was an old trick of the Unknown's, and it always meant something.

As soon as he was certain that the detective was actually missing he woke up Dick and drew him away from the camp.

"What in thunder is the matter now?" asked Dick, rubbing his eyes sleepily.

"Zed's gone!"

"Where?"

"Don't know."

"At his old tricks again?"

"Evidently."

"Ned, he's struck something."

"That's what."

"Know what I think?"

"I can't read your thoughts, but I know my own."

"My idea is that the Unknown has struck the gold robbers' trail."

"That's mine."

"Then we must strike him, for I won't have him running these big risks alone."

"Not much! It won't do at all. What in the world would we do if we were to lose him?"

This was a possibility not pleasant to think about.

After a little further conversation the boys determined to start out after the detective, leaving Edith asleep under the rocks.

So Ned lighted the lantern, and they walked to the mouth of the canyon. The cold night air and the exercise drove away all feelings of sleepiness. The boys were thoroughly on the alert by the time they had reached the canyon.

"No sight of the Unknown," remarked Dick, and yet do you know I'm sure he must have come back here."

"I can't imagine where else he would go."

"There's no other place, of course. He thinks the robbers are around here somewhere, and his scheme is to locate them while we are asleep."

They were still talking when they reached the place where the trail vanished.

Ned flashed his lantern against the massive wall of the canyon just as he had done a dozen times before, when all at once he saw a man standing with his back against the rocks, facing them.

It was the one-eyed Mr. Butters. He put up his hand and touching his forefinger to his lips, made a gesture for silence, at the same time pointing up to the rocks on the other side.

Ned's rifle was up the instant he saw him, and, although he knew better, the man's manner was so earnest that he instinctively turned his head, Dick doing the same.

Two rifle shots brought him to his senses. Wheeling around, Ned was ready to fire at Butters in less than two seconds, but there was no Butters to fire at. The one-eyed man had disappeared.

"Hold on, Dick! Don't you move till we know where we are at!" breathed Ned, extinguishing the lantern.

Several shots were fired, striking the rocks around them.

But the boys were in the shadow now, and they did no damage.

After a moment the echoes died away, and once more all was still.

"This is a bad job," breathed Dick. "What shall we do?"

"If we move we'll be laid out sure."

"It looks like it! What fools we were not to have jumped on that fellow while we had the chance."

"We didn't have the chance."

"Yes, we did."

"I say no!"

"Why, we might have jumped on him before he fired at us."

"The one-eyed man?"

"Yes; who else?"

"He never fired at us at all, Dick."

"Are you crazy? Of course he did."

"Tell you he didn't. Those shots came from the top of the bluff on the other side. He warned us against them—that's what."

Dick refused to believe it, but Ned had been too attentive to the whole occurrence to admit that he was mistaken, for he knew he was not.

While they stood there talking in whispers and uncertain what to do, a low whistle was heard above them, and looking up, they saw the one-eyed Mr. Butters standing on a ledge about forty feet up from the bed of the canyon.

He was gesticulating violently, pointing toward the big white boulder near which the trail of the gold robbers disappeared.

"He wants us to go there," breathed Ned. "Don't you see he has no gun."

"That's right! Give him a call."

"No, no, no! I've got an idea that he is working with us."

"Impossible, Ned!"

"I can't help thinking so. It has come over me all at once that it is so. Let's do what he wants, and go to the rock?"

"Turn our backs on him? Not on your life."

"Go, go!" Butters seemed to say as far as the rapid movement of his pointing finger could be understood.

"I'm going!" said Ned, decidedly. "That man is for us, and I know it."

And Ned sprang for the white rock.

Dick followed him. The expected shots did not come.

They now turned and looked back at the one-eyed man.

He was still standing on the ledge; they could just distinguish him in the dim light.

His finger now took a semi-circular motion. It seemed as if he wanted them to go in behind the rock.

Now this was something the boys had not done before, for the rock was close to the wall of the canyon and they had never dreamed of any opening being there.

Yet there it was. No sooner had they passed behind it than they perceived a broad break in the wall of the canyon nearly the width of the rock, but not high enough to be visible above it.

"A cave!" breathed Dick.

"And wide enough to take in sleds, dogs and everything else," said Ned. "We've solved the mystery. This is the way they went."

"Are we going into that hole?"

"I am."

"It's as much as our lives are worth."

"All the same I'm going to try it, and I'll bet you what you like the Unknown has gone in ahead of us."

"Where's the one-eyed man now?"

They looked back but could not see him.

It was quite evident that the one-eyed man had accomplished what he set out to do, for he had disappeared off the ledge.

"I don't like it for a cent," said Dick. "If it was only Butters I wouldn't so much care; but who were the fellows who fired the other shots? They saw us, too, and they'll be on the lookout for us, you may be very sure."

"Whoever they are they were on the other side of the canyon. If we stand fooling here it will give them time to get around."

"All right," said Dick desperately. "Here we go; if you are bound to risk it I won't hold back."

"Shall we light the lantern?"

"We've got to if we don't want to break our necks."

Ned lit the lantern and flashed it into the opening.

He immediately saw that it was no cave they were looking into, but a vast rift in the rocks, cut off from the main break in the mountains by a wall pierced by no other opening than this.

They hurried through and immediately found themselves in the rift.

It was not over ten feet wide, and the walls extended up to the full height of the mountain. There was snow on the ground which had driven in between the walls, and upon it the trail of the dog sleds could be distinctly seen.

"By gracious, we've struck it!" cried Dick. "We've got the trail again."

"We can thank Ben Butters for that."

"Is the man working with us? I declare it looks so."

"Didn't I tell you so? Come on."

They now hurried forward, anxious to see the end of this strange adventure. The floor of the rift immediately be-

gan to ascend. If it kept on so it was evident that it would take them to the top of those mighty bluffs which lie to the east of White Horse rapids.

It was a ticklish business.

The boys traveled on in silence.

To say that they were not afraid would be anything but the truth, but they were brave enough to keep straight on in spite of their fears.

At every step they expected to hear the ring of a rifle and to have shots come whirling down upon them; but nothing of the kind happened.

They toiled on up, keeping the trail of the dog sleds in sight all the way, and at last they reached the top of the bluffs and came out upon a broad tableland, covered deep with snow and stretching as far as the eye could reach, broken here and there by great heaps of boulders piled one upon the other.

It looked for all the world as if some great giant had picked up a handful of these huge rocks and strewn them about on top of the bluff.

For a few moments the boys stood staring around in silence.

Ned had extinguished the lantern immediately upon coming out on the level, for the clouds had now passed and the stars were shining with the usual marvelous beauty of the Arctic night.

"I don't see a soul here," said Ned. "I was hoping that our one-eyed friend would be about."

"If he's a friend let him prove it now," replied Dick.

"There's the trail all right, though. He showed us that."

"So he did; but why?"

"Oh, you can imagine any reason—mine is just as good as yours."

"I suppose; but I'm willing to find the trail at any cost."

"And ain't I?" replied Ned. "Don't I feel thoroughly called down by our loss? It ain't so much the gold, Dick, but we set out to guard it and see it safely through to Juneau, and—well, we failed, and, what's more, the Unknown tells the truth when he says it is all my fault."

"Speaking of the Unknown, look here," said Dick pointing down to the snow.

"Footsteps running alongside the trail!"

"Yes, and fresh ones. Can the Unknown have been here?"

"It looks like it."

"Don't it! I'll bet you what you like those are his footprints. They are just about the size of Zed's feet."

"We are right in it all around, then. But come, let's get on and see where this will end."

"It's going to end around the other side of those rocks, and don't you forget it. I expect to see a cave there."

"A cave! Nonsense!"

"No nonsense about it. I mean a hut, of course. Don't you know that prospectors have been digging here and there all along the line between Juneau and Dawson for the last few years? Whenever they located, as a rule, they built themselves a hut. Of course most of such diggings

did not pay, and even those that did have been abandoned since the great rush to the Klondike came on."

"I shouldn't think there was a ghost of a chance of making a strike on top of these bluffs."

"Well, it does not offer any very great promises, and that's a fact; but still, some one may have tried it here. My idea is that Ben Butters is the man, and—by gracious there he is now!"

A low whistle was heard behind them at the edge of the bluff. They looked around and saw the one-eyed man coming slowly toward them over the snow.

"That's him," said Young Klondike.

"Sure! He moves slower than molasses. Can there be anything the matter with his legs?"

"He walks like a man who was all played out."

"Don't he! See, he's doing the finger act again. That signal means for us to stop."

The boys stood still and waited, but they held on to their rifles and had them all ready for trouble in case it came.

Evidently Ben Butters realized how they felt, for he held up both hands as a sign of his peaceful intentions, and to show that he was not armed.

"So you did take the hint at last," he said as he drew near. "Say, you were confounded slow about it. Came near paying the price, too. You didn't see them Injuns up on top of the bluffs?"

"What do you want with us?" asked Ned coldly. "You're a nice kind of a man, you are."

"So help me heaven, I'm an honest man," cried Butters. "Young Klondike, you saved my life. I'd have starved and frozen only for you, and I want you to understand I did not rob you of your gold."

"I wish you could make me believe it," replied Ned. "I'm ready to change my opinion, but the fact remains, my friend, you came with the rest who did the robbery—isn't it so?"

"It is. When a man is perishing in the snow, don't he feel like taking any help that comes along?"

"Was that your case?"

"Yes, sir. I was half frozen. I fell asleep and tumbled off the load and wasn't able to get out of the drift."

"We went back to look for you, but we couldn't find you."

"Because I was already found. I was pulled out before you could get there, and I had to chime in with them fellows. They'd have killed me if I hadn't."

"Is that it?"

"It is."

"You seemed to keep right in with them when the robbery was done, too."

"For the same reason. They were watching you, Young Klondike; they saw their chance and took it. They knew who you were and what you had with you; they made up their minds to get it and did, but I couldn't help going at it with them; if I had refused there'd been a knife at my heart quicker'n scat. Do you believe me, or don't you?"

"I believe you," said Ned, accepting the hand which Ben Butters held out.

The one-eyed man shook hands energetically.

"You're a man and a gentleman," he said, "and I'm going to help you to get your gold back."

"Can you do it?"

"I can. It's all my doing that they are here; I held them back all I knew, and when we found that you were very likely to overtake us, I was determined you should have at least a chance to get back the gold."

"Where are they now?"

"Within half a mile of this place. I used to mine it here, and that's the way I came to know about it. I says to Nick Nivens, let's go into my old ranch and stop for a couple of days and give Young Klondike a chance to pass us, that's what I says; and so they done it, and then I cut away and came down to the canyon to watch for you."

"Have you seen our friend to-night?" Ned asked.

"Him with the big boots?"

"Yes."

"No, I haven't."

"How about my men?"

"Two on 'em were traitors, Young Klondike. It was them as gave you away."

"I suspected it! And Charley Coons?"

"They've got him with them. He pretends he's going to join their band; but he's only playing it on 'em. Give him a chance and you'll soon see."

"That's Charley, all over," said Ned. "I knew I could depend upon him. Now then, Butters, make your words good. Show us this gang. I suppose this man Nivens you speak of is the leader, ain't he?"

"That's what he is, and as tough a scoundrel as ever went unhung. Oh, I can show 'em to you all right, but of course you can't tackle 'em now."

"We'll see about that."

"You might. You're full of pluck. Where's boots and the lady?"

"Never mind about them. You do your part. I suppose you stand ready to help us if it comes to a fight?"

"Do I? Don't I? Just you trust me and see?"

"I'm ready whenever you are."

"I'm ready now. Come on. All you've got to do is to follow the trail, and I must say that you couldn't have come at a better time, for it's my opinion that all hands is pretty well pickled about now. They were laying in the lurch at a great rate when I came away."

"Then that's just our chance," said Dick as they started along the trail.

"What do you think now?" whispered Ned. It was safe to speak, for Ben Butters was a little in advance.

"It looks straight enough."

"He certainly seems sincere."

"That's what he does. Let him look out for himself if he isn't. I don't think I shall stand much nonsense from him to-night. But we want to look out sharp, Ned."

No one realized this any better than Young Klondike himself, and his eyes were everywhere as they hurried on.

Ben Butters led them over among the loose boulders, just as Ned had predicted.

A light burned in the window, but no guard was to be seen, and after they had watched a few minutes Ben Butters declared there was none.

"I believe they are all drunk and asleep," he said.

"Wouldn't it be a good time to go for 'em, Young Klondike? Don't want to urge you none, but——"

"But you think a bold rush would do the business," said Ned. "Well, so do I."

"You've taken the words right out of my mouth, boss."

"Have I? Well, there's something more to me than words. I'm ready to take our gold right out of that hut. Dick, what do you say?"

"I'm with you, Ned."

"You, too, Butters?"

"Of course, that's what I'm out for," replied the one-eyed man.

Ned examined his rifle. "Ready!" he said.

They moved quietly upon the hut. Creeping up to the hut, Ned peered in.

There was a blazing fire upon the stone hearth, and around it the toughs lay sprawled out.

All hands were apparently sound asleep, and some were snoring and making themselves very distinctly heard.

"Now," breathed Young Klondike, laying his hand on the latch.

He flung back the door.

The noise awakened one or two of the toughs, and they started up.

"Gee whiz! It's Young Klondike," one shouted out.

Ned, Dick and Ben Butters held the interior covered with their rifles.

"You want to surrender, boys!" called Young Klondike. "I've come for the gold, and I mean to have it if I shoot down every man in this hut!"

CHAPTER VII.

OFF WITH THE GOLD.

Young Klondike's determined action did the business for the moment.

"Out of the hut, every mother's son of you," he shouted. "I'll give you till I count three to skip."

All hands were up by this time. Charley Coons sprang over to the door, shouting:

"Let 'em have it, boss! Let 'em have it!"

As he passed Andy he dealt him a stunning blow between the eyes, which sent the treacherous dog driver sprawling on the floor.

This was the signal for the fight to begin.

Nick Nivens made a rush for Ned, who instantly fired.

So did Dick and Ben Butters.

At the same moment a gust of wind came sweeping down the chimney; the interior of the hut was filled with smoke and the light extinguished.

"I'm shot!" yelled Nivens, and there was the sound of a fall.

In the darkness it was hard to see what was happening, but the rush to the back door could be heard plain enough.

Young Klondike led off in another round.

What damage it did it was impossible to tell, but as the smoke cleared away Ned found that they had the hut to themselves.

"They're gone!" he cried.

"Drive 'em! Drive 'em!" shouted Charley Coons. "Drive 'em, boss, while you've got the chance."

They ran through to the back door, the man Andy crawling out by the front when he saw his chance.

So much for a little pluck and determination.

This gang of toughs had been driven away from their arms—every rifle was in the hut.

Most of the men were half drunk or it would not have been so.

They stopped outside on the snow a little way from the hut and called back all sorts of uncomplimentary things at the boys.

"Fire!" yelled Ben Butters. "Blow the blasted robbers to blazes."

Ned and Dick let their rifles speak again and the thieves started off on the run.

Some were so drunk that they could scarcely go, and two tumbled down among the boulders.

"Don't one of you dare to show your face here!" shouted Ned. "It will be death to the man who does it—that's all." They returned to the hut.

"By gracious, you've done it, Young Klondike! You've done it!" cried the one-eyed man.

"I knew I could," replied Ned. "Now, then, where's the gold?"

"In the dog shed."

"We want to be off with it, and we'll take the dogs, too," said Dick.

"It's death to those men if we do," replied Ned. "How in the world will they ever get out of here?"

"What do you waste your time thinking of them for?" cried the one-eyed man. "Are the blame thieves entitled to any consideration? I say not."

"Perhaps they ain't; still I don't want to put them in a position where they must starve to death."

"You are too considerate by half. They won't have any such mercy on you if they ever get you foul, and don't you forget it."

"Ned is right," said Dick. "We don't want to be barbarous. Now for the gold."

"Dick, you keep watch," said Ned. "Fire at the first man who shows his nose around the rocks."

Ben Butters led the way to the shed outside, where the dogs could be heard yelping, having been aroused by the shots.

"Lie down there! Lie down and be quiet!" a voice was heard to say inside the shed.

"Thunder! There's someone inside there," breathed Ned.

"Can't imagine who it can be," whispered Butters. "I've accounted for all hands, unless, though, it is Andy. He crawled out the front way."

"Probably that's who it is," said Ned. "Throw open the door, Butters. I'm good for Andy, I guess."

Butters obeyed, when out came the dogs with a rush.

To Ned's amazement they were harnessed to one of the sleds, and on that sled all the boxes of gold were piled, and on top of the boxes sat the Unknown, holding the reins in one hand and the dog whip in the other.

"Hooray! Whoa, January!" he shouted. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, I'm a boodler, for I've captured the boodle! No waiting in this shop! Get aboard, there! Holler for Dick! Off we go!"

"You old rascal! What brought you here?" cried Ned, immensely delighted.

"My legs, dear boy!" They did the business. Ye gods and little fishes, but they're good ones! All aboard for Juneau! You've done the toughs up brown, but I'd have snaked the gold out in ten minutes, anyhow, even if you hadn't come. Get aboard!"

"Hold on! Give us a chance to get hold of their rifles, won't you?" said Ned, for the Unknown, in his impatience, kept cracking his whip and the dogs were jumping about at a great rate.

"Rifles! Oh, yes! Rifles, by all means! Scoop in all you can, Young Klondike; only hurry up and shoot the rest of the dogs. We don't want to give them fellows a chance to follow us—not much."

But Ned, moved by feelings of humanity, inwardly vowed he wouldn't do it, although Charley Coons and the one-eyed man openly sided with the Unknown.

Dick now came running around the hut and in a moment the rifles were loaded on top of the boxes. All hands got on the sled then. Dick and Ned sprang up on the load by the Unknown, Butters and Charley Coons standing on the runners and holding on.

The Unknown cracked his whip and away they went, flying.

As Ned looked back he could see Nick Nivens and the man Tom standing among the boulders looking at them, watching as they whirled away.

Ned had his way, and the dogs belonging to the other sled had not been harmed.

Some may think Young Klondike foolish to insist on leaving the toughs the means to follow, but there can be no question that Ned did just the right thing.

The common law of humanity should be observed under all circumstances.

It would have been more human for Young Klondike to have shot down every one of the thieves than to have left them without the means of getting out of this terrible country.

And Ned felt rewarded for his action when he received the hearty approval of Edith on his return to the camp under the rocks.

"You did just right," she declared. "It would have been barbarous to have left them without dogs. Don't you mind what anyone says."

But Charley Coons and the one-eyed man had a great deal to say, in spite of Edith's remark.

"You'll regret it! You'll regret it!" Butters kept growling.

"That will do," said Ned. "Now, then, no more about it. We are going on the move at once."

This was the last.

Even the in-bound Klondikers had talked themselves out on the subject of Ned's bold dash, and congratulations had been showered upon our hero for his bravery and pluck.

The gold was repacked on the two sleds and Charley Coons took his old place as driver and guide.

Ben Butters took the other sled.

Bidding the Klondikers good-by, our little party went whirling through the canyons.

They saw nothing of the Indians who had attacked them from the top of the bluffs, and nothing of the gold robbers.

They were soon through the canyons, and morning found them running over the ice down the twenty-five mile river run to Marsh lake.

Here there was less snow and a solid crust covered what there was.

This made it easy going, and the dogs, under the inspiration of Charley Coons' trained hand, seemed to fairly fly over the ice. Daylight found them at Marsh lake, and by sunset they had covered the whole nineteen miles of its length, and the six-mile river was done besides before they even thought of going into camp for the night.

When they did it was on the banks of Tagish lake in a thick cluster of fir trees with a hill to protect them on the side toward the wind.

Great boughs were broken off the fir trees, and dry wood having been gathered a roaring fire was built, the green boughs making a loud crackling as they were thrown upon the flames.

"This is just the spot for a camp," said Ned. "We'll put in a jolly night of it here. We've got off with the gold in fine shape. Let Nick Nivens and his gang catch us if they can."

So supper was cooked in the big iron pot and shelters were built of fir boughs, one for Edith and the other for the two men and a third for the dogs and the Unknown.

The evening passed pleasantly, being enlivened by songs from Edith, and Ned did some fine playing on his banjo, having recovered it with the rest of his belongings at the hut.

The Unknown told how he had found the way to the hut alone, and how he had sneaked into the shed and was on the very point of driving the dog team out when he heard Ned and Dick come up.

"I was watching you all the time, Young Klondike," he declared. "Don't you forget it. I had my eye right on you. If there had been the least danger of you're not being able to down those fellows I'd have been right out with you, but I knew well enough you'd do it, and so you did."

"You bet they did!" said Charley Coons. "Gee whiz, boss, I never felt so relieved in all my life as when I saw your face there at the door."

So they talked the matter over and over until it was thoroughly exhausted, and then Ned and Dick went on guard and let the others turn in.

In spite of the fact that they had been up all the night before the boys did not feel a bit sleepy.

Regular living and constant exposure to the severe but healthy climate of Alaska had made these boys as tough as iron.

There was no amount of fatigue that they were not capable of enduring.

Edith and the Unknown were always ready to do their share, but the boys took splendid care of Edith and would

never allow her to over-fatigue herself, and ever since they started out from Dawson City they had been particularly careful that she should get her sleep.

"Say, Ned, we've made elegant time to-day," remarked Dick as they sat together by the fire. "If we continue to have such weather as this it won't take long for us to put it through to Juneau."

"How much further have we got to go?" asked Ned.

"Blest if I can remember."

"Nor I. These distances along the rivers and over the lakes are always slipping out of my head. Hold on till I get out my map and have a look."

Ned had provided himself with an excellent map of the Juneau trail before leaving Dawson City.

It was a home-made affair, sketched out by Pete Rowley, an old-time Yukoner who knew every foot of the way, and being absolutely correct in all its details was far superior to any map money could buy.

"Let's see," he said, bending over the fire's light; "it's nineteen miles to the head of lake Tagish, two miles over the Rainbow Crossing, that's twenty-one; then it's twenty-four to the head of Lake Bennett, that's forty-five, and one mile to the foot of Lake Linderman makes forty-six."

"Gracious! Are we as near Lake Linderman as all that?" exclaimed Dick.

"That's what we are. It sounds as though we were almost to Juneau, but there's the terrible Chilkoot Pass to be done yet. Let's see, forty-six I said. Well, it's six miles over Linderman, and that makes fifty-two, and eight and a half up to the top of the pass is sixty and a half, and nine over the pass is sixty-nine and a half, and that brings us within six miles of Dyea, and—hold on, Dick, what was that?"

Ned dropped the map and seized his rifle.

A shadow had passed in front of the fire.

It was only seen for an instant and then vanished among the fir trees; but that instant was enough to show Young Klondike that it was the shadow of a man.

CHAPTER VIII.

CAUGHT AT THE CACHE.

"Dick, that was a man!"

"It was, sure."

"What in thunder can it mean? It ain't possible that it can be Nick Nivens and his gang caught up with us!"

"Oh, I don't believe it! I can't believe it. Hush! keep a still tongue! We'll wait and see if he shows himself again."

They waited for fully ten minutes and saw nothing.

"Hadn't we better call the Unknown?" whispered Ned.

"Perhaps we had. I'm afraid there's going to be trouble."

"By gracious, I hope not! We've had trouble enough. I did hope that it was going to be plain sailing from this on."

"All the same, we'd better wake Zed up. His advice is always good, and if there is anyone sneaking about here

he'd be sure to get on to the truth where we might blunder ahead and get into trouble before we knew it."

Ned started back into the shelter only to meet with one of those surprises to which the Unknown so often treated them.

The big bearskin upon which the detective was supposed to be sleeping was vacant.

The Unknown had crawled out from the shelter on the other side, and his rifle had gone with him.

As usual, the detective had been on the alert.

"He's gone?" whispered Ned, returning to Dick.

"Then there you are—it was Zed we saw."

"Come on! Let's have a look! I can't believe that."

A low whistle sounded at that moment off among the trees at some little distance away from the camp.

"There he is!" breathed Ned; "and he's calling us, too, Zed has got on to something, sure."

"It looks so."

"Sounds so, you mean. Come on, come on."

"They hurried in the direction of the sound, coming upon the detective in a moment.

He was standing at the top of the little hill under which they had made their camp, and he held up his finger as they approached.

"What is it?" whispered Ned, coming up.

"Look down there!"

"Where? I see nothing."

"You don't? Now wait. I do."

The detective was pointing down into the hollow on the other side of the hill.

It was rather dark that night. For some time the clouds had been gathering and now there was not a star to be seen.

The temperature had risen and the wind was rising, too; there was every evidence that another snow storm was hovering around them, although the boys had not realized this until they came up on top of the hill where they could see.

"Zed, what is it?" asked Dick. "I'll be blest if I can see anything. Was that you who passed in front of the fire just now?"

"No, it wasn't."

"Ah!"

"Indeed, it wasn't, dear boy. I saw that shadow go in front of the fire. I was lying there awake listening to your talk, when it came. You bet I was out here in a moment and in time to see him, too."

"See who?"

"The Indian."

"Hello! So it was an Indian," breathed Ned.

"That's what. There were two of them down there in that hollow a minute ago."

"If there's two, there are more."

"Probably. By the Jumping Jeremiah, there'll be no sleep in camp to-night until we have solved this mystery. I tell you, Young Klondike, I don't like it for a cent, and I don't believe you do, either."

"Still we are in as good shape to fight Indians as any party of our size can possibly be; look at all the spare rifles we've got."

"That's right. We've got rifles enough, but—ha! there he is again! Look, look! There by that clump of trees on the side of the hollow."

"I see him!" said Ned. "A big buck six feet and over, a tremendous fellow! There, he's gone!"

"No, no! There he is again," said Dick.

"It ain't the same one," declared the detective. "That's the other. There, he's pulled in out of sight, too; now you've seen them both."

"Do you think that's all of them?" asked Dick. "It might be; you can't be sure that there's a band, just because you've seen two."

"You can't, eh? Look there!" said Ned, pointing to the other side of the hollow. "Of course you see what's going on over there!"

It needed no glass to see what Ned had discovered. In spite of the darkness the snow made it light enough for them to see very distinctly a band of fully a dozen Indians, standing motionless under the trees on the other side of the hollow.

They were dressed in long fur coats reaching almost to their heels, with heavy fur caps on their heads.

Whether they were armed or not could not be told. They seemed to be talking to each other earnestly, and every now and then one fellow bigger than all the rest would gesticulate to one of those on the other side of the hollow. The gestures were returned, but what they meant could not be determined.

"Except that it's mischief," said the Unknown, as they stood talking and watching. They are up to some dodge or another, and it all means mischief and an attack on our camp.

"Hadn't we better harness right up and get out?" suggested Dick.

"And start the dogs barking? Oh, no! That would bring them down upon us like a thousand of brick," declared the detective. "No; we won't do that."

"Do you suppose they've got dogs, too?"

"Who can tell? See them looking up at the sky. What are they watching for? By the Jumping Jeremiah, this is the most puzzling thing I ever ran up against. I can't make it out at all!"

"They are watching for the moon to come out, that's what," said Dick.

"They'll watch a long time, then," replied Ned.

"Don't you feel so sure," said the detective. "The clouds are breaking a bit up there, and unless I'm greatly mistaken the moon will be out in a minute, and it does seem as though they were watching for it, too."

A few moments later the moon did come out for the moment.

The instant it appeared the larger band of Indians ran swiftly across the snow to the middle of the hollow, where there was a pile of rocks.

The other two came toward them from their side, moving slowly over the snow.

"Why, they are pacing their way. What does it mean?" muttered the detective.

"See them all looking down on the snow," said Ned.

"This business has got nothing to do with us. I'm sure of it."

"It begins to look so," said the Unknown. "It certainly begins to look so. They are following the shadow of the moon—I mean those two—that's what they are about, as sure as fate."

"It's a cache," exclaimed Ned, suddenly.

Now, a cache is a place where provisions or goods have been buried, for in Alaska it is quite a common thing for travelers not wishing to be burdened with their effects to bury them, with the intention of returning later to dig them up.

Such hiding places are called caches, and they are usually marked in some way, often plain enough for anyone to detect them, at other times by some secret sign.

Ned jumped at the conclusion that this cache must have been described to the Indians, and that it was marked by the shadow of a certain big fir tree thrown when the moon was at her full.

"I wouldn't wonder a bit if you was right," said the detective. "They are hunting a cache—that's just what they are about."

"See, they've found the place," said Dick. "They are driving a stake in the snow."

It was all very interesting, but the boys naturally wanted to know what it had to do with them.

After the stake had been driven the Indians turned and hurried away, and although neither Ned nor his companions relaxed their watch all night they were seen no more.

They did not venture down into the hollow, for they did not like to leave the camp, but after breakfast, which was served at six o'clock, they left Charley Coons to look after the dogs, and all started off to go to the stake.

"That's a cache, sure," said Ben Butters, "but however the reds came to get onto that shadow business beats me."

"They were on to it all right, though," said the Unknown. "If you had seen them measuring it off you'd have thought so."

"What do you suppose can be buried there?" asked Edith. "Mebbe it's provisions."

"Or gold," suggested Dick.

"I've no idea it can be gold," said the detective. "Much more likely that Brother Butters is right, and it's simply grub."

"Are we going to dig it up?" asked Edith.

"Hardly. It would take us all day."

"If I thought it was gold I'd put in all the day, or all the week at it," said Butters, and he was going on to say more when Dick suddenly stopped short, whispering:

"Hist! Hist! They are at it now!"

It was not yet light; of course it would not be until after ten o'clock, but the clouds were gone and the moon shone out bright, so there was no trouble in looking down into the hollow, for they had now come to the top of the hill.

The Indians were there—as many as twenty of them.

They had cleaned away the snow all around the spot where the stake had been driven and were now piling wood on the ground, with the evident intention of starting a fire to thaw out the frozen earth.

"Say, they can't know that we are here," said Dick. "They'd never do that if they did."

"Perhaps they know and don't care," said Edith.

"All I know is I saw one of those Indians near our fire last night," declared the detective positively.

"It seemed as though they must know," said Ned. "We can't do anything now unless we want to fight."

As no one was spoiling for an Indian fight just then they still watched and waited.

The Indians started a roaring fire over the place where the stake had been driven and then quietly retreated into the woods.

This seemed a curious move. Time passed and they did not return. Daylight came and still nothing was seen of them.

Meanwhile the fire had died down to a heap of smoldering coals.

Ned stood this as long as he could, and then declared that he was going down to investigate.

"If you go I go, too," said the Unknown. "You needn't think you are going to take all the risk of capture, Young Klondike."

"Zed has spoken for me," said Dick.

"And for me, too," declared Edith.

"Say, I wouldn't muss with this business," drawled Ben Butters. "Suppose we start right off on the move."

"Vote on it!" cried Ned. "All in favor of moving say 'Aye!'"

"Aye!" said Ben Butters and Charley Coons.

"Contrary minded, 'No!'" cried Ned.

"No!" "No!" "No!" Edith, Dick and the Unknown all gave their vote with a determination which would have settled the business even if Ned had not added his.

"Butters, you and Charley go back to the sleds and get everything ready," said Young Klondike. "We are out for adventure and mean to have all there is going."

"Oh, say, come now, I don't mean to funk," Butters drawled.

"Nor I, either," said Charley.

"Nobody accuses you of that," said the Unknown. "Somebody has got to look after the dogs, and it might as well be you two as anyone else. Anyhow, it's settled if Young Klondike says so. He's the boss."

This conversation took place at the camp. Soon after Ned led the way back to the brow of the hill, leaving Butters and Charley behind on guard.

There were no Indians in sight. The hollow was utterly deserted. For a long time they watched the smoke curling up from the coals in the bottom of the hollow; the coast seemed perfectly clear.

"It's all right—right as the mail," declared the Unknown. "Let's make a move."

"All down in a bunch?" asked Dick. "I say no."

"And I say double no," declared the Unknown. "Let's divide; two of us will go down on one side and two on the other. The signal for Indians discovered will be a whistle; if they come for us, by the Jumping Jeremiah, we'll do some tall talking to them with our rifles—that will be a language they can understand."

It was Edith and Dick and Young Klondike and the Unknown.

The latter took to the fir clump on the right side of the hollow. They saw no Indians when they got down opposite the fire, and at last they ventured to walk out toward the supposed cache.

The fire had about burned out and the ground under it seemed to be pretty well thawed.

Beyond the cache was a pile of loose boulders, just the place for Indians to hide.

"I don't like that," said the Unknown, pointing to them. "We ought to have got a sight in behind those rocks before we came here."

"Pshaw! I don't believe there's any danger," replied Ned. "Just think how long we've been watching and—heavens! We're in for it as sure as fate!"

Out from behind the boulders a band of a dozen or more Indians sprang.

Some were armed with rifles and some with bows and arrows.

They opened fire on Ned and the Unknown, and at the same instant a sharp whistle coming from the direction of Edith and Dick told Ned that they had struck Indians, too.

"Run for your life!" shouted the Unknown. But Ned stopped to fire.

Before he could get his rifle to his shoulder an arrow took him in the right wrist, wounding him slightly.

His rifle fell among the coals, and in stopping to recover it Ned stumbled and fell.

Before he could recover himself the Indians were upon him.

With fiendish yells some seized poor Ned and held him prisoner, while others sent shots and arrows flying after the Unknown, who, with his tall hat on the back of his head, was running for the timber at top speed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TOTEM OF THE BEAR.

It was a complete call-down for Young Klondike.

Here he was a prisoner in the hands of a band of some fifteen Coppermine Indians, as ugly a collection of savages as one could ask to see.

They clustered about him, jabbering away in their own language.

One seized his rifle, others went through his pockets, and to make matters worse, while this was going on Ned, to his utter dismay, saw Edith and Dick being dragged into the hollow by ten more savages.

This was worse and worse. Young Klondike heartily wished that he had voted no instead of yes, but it was all too late for vain regrets now.

"Don't say anything," whispered Ned, as Dick passed near him. "Let me do the talking. We may work out of this snap yet."

"White boy no makee heap talk," growled a big buck.

"Comashee, he boss, he do talkee. White boy hold him tongue."

"What does Comashee want?" asked Ned, quietly. "We are friends to the Indian. We don't want to make war, we want to make peace."

He rightly judged that the big buck was Comashee himself. There was nothing to be gained by getting excited. Ned looked at Edith, and as far as outward appearance went the brave girl was as cool as he was himself, but Comashee made no answer to Ned's fine speech.

The prisoners were now hurried off behind the boulders.

As soon as they had rounded the rocks Young Klondike saw what a great mistake he had made.

Here the land sloped down abruptly into another hollow, at the bottom of which was an Indian village. Some twenty tepees of poles and skins were there, which, owing to their peculiar situation, had been perfectly hidden from the higher land above.

A number of ugly old squaws and a great number of dogs and children came rushing out to meet them.

The dogs barked and the children yelled and shouted. Peeping out of the tepees they could see younger women, who seemed afraid to show themselves to strangers.

It was a trying moment. Ned thought that the dogs would tear them to pieces, for they sprang upon them, barking furiously, but their conductors roughly ordered them back and took the prisoners into a large tepee, where they were left to themselves, but in the most uncomfortable situation possible, being tied up to the poles of the tepee with hands bound behind them. They could sit there on the snow and move a little sideways, but they could not rise or in any way help themselves.

"White boys stay here," grunted Comashee, "and white girl stay, too. Ugh! Ugh! Bimeby we make heap big fire! Bimeby white boys and white girl help make heap big fire. Ugh! Ugh!"

Having indulged in this pleasant sentiment, Comashee and the other Indians left the tepee.

"Well, this is a great start," groaned Dick. "No one ever need call me lucky after this."

"Don't fret about it," replied Ned. "Dick, it's a bad business, but there's going to be a way out of it. I'm sure I ain't making any mistake."

"That's right; be hopeful, Ned," said Edith. "As for me, I was so glad to find you alive after all that firing that I haven't given a thought to my own danger, and I don't propose to, either. We've been in tight places before and have managed to get out of them, and I am just as sure as you are that we shall manage to get out of this."

There is nothing like being hopeful in a time of trouble.

Ned Golden had always made this his rule, and it had saved him a lot of needless worry. Still, it must be confessed that there was nothing very hopeful about their present situation.

Edith did not seem to understand the allusion of the Indian to the big fire which they were to help make, but Ned and Dick understood it only too well.

It meant torture—the worst kind of torture.

The Coppermine Indians of Alaska are a cruel, barbarous race.

Torture by fire is one of their favorite methods of disposing of white prisoners.

Unlike their brethren in the United States, they do not scalp their white prisoners; they burn them at the stake.

"Don't say a word, Dick," Ned breathed in his companion's ear, so quietly that Edith, who sat at some little distance from them, did not hear.

Dick took the hint and held his tongue.

Ned then told the story of his capture.

Dick's story had already been told.

The Indians had pounced upon them suddenly, as they were moving down among the fir trees.

Dick's theory was that they must have been hiding among the trees, for he and Edith found themselves surrounded before they knew it. They did not have time to fire even one shot.

"Seems to me the Unknown might have stood by you better," said Dick, as they sat there talking. "It ain't a bit like him to cut and run the way he did."

"I don't blame him," replied Ned. "He saw his chance to escape and he took it. For my part I'm glad he got off. He couldn't have helped me any, and I'm sure he can do us all more good as it is than if he had stayed."

The short season of daylight passed rapidly and darkness found Young Klondike and his friends still prisoners in the tepee.

It was awful to sit there on the snow in the cold.

Yet fortunately it was warm for Alaska, the thermometer standing at a little above zero.

They were dressed for this sort of weather and were able to endure it.

If the cold had been some fifty degrees below, as it often was, they would have perished where they sat.

All this time there seemed to be great excitement going on in the Indian village.

The smell of roasting meat was very much in evidence all the afternoon. The bucks were coming and going, the children shouted and the women screamed shrilly to each other, the dogs keeping up an incessant barking, of course.

All this puzzled Ned greatly. He could not make head nor tail of it. What puzzled him more was why the Indians did not attack their camp and steal the dogs and the gold.

With Edith and Dick he discussed this over and over again, but without coming to any conclusion. All through the long hours they had seen no one excepting when now and then a papoose would look into the tepee.

About five o'clock, when the noise and confusion seemed to be at its height, the skin flap of the tepee was suddenly thrown aside, and to Young Klondike's immense amazement in walked Ben Butters, followed by a big buck.

It was not Comashee, and Ned did not remember to have seen him before.

The Indian stood in the doorway and growled out something which Butters seemed to understand well enough, and what surprised Ned still more, he answered him in the Indian language, which naturally set him to wondering if the one-eyed man had turned traitor.

Ben Butters soon set these suspicions at rest.

"Howdy, Young Klondike," he said. "Howdy, Mr. Dick. Miss Edith, don't you despair. We're all watching you, and

we mean to rescue you. The Unknown says cheer up and be brave. We'll help you, but it can't be done just now."

"Does he understand what you are saying?" asked Ned, suspiciously, at the same time pointing to the "buck."

"Not a word. Don't you worry. Now, listen to me, for my time is short here and I've got to say it all in a minute. Let Nibsin watch you—he'll have to take it out in watching, for he don't understand a word that's being said."

"Tell us what you're driving at, and tell it quick," said Ned. "You must see what a bad job this is for us."

To this the one-eyed man replied in the following remarkable speech, which we give in full, because it will enable us to go right on with our story, and tell of the highly interesting events which happened later.

"Look here, Young Klondike, the time has come when I can show my gratitude to you and yourn. This here ain't my first trip to Alaska. I was up here with a fur trading party ten year ago, and got mixed up with the Copper mine Injuns. I lived among them for two years, and that's the time I got acquainted with Nibsin. I did him the biggest kind of a favor then. I saved his life and rescued him from the Thlinkit Injuns and got my eye shot out doing it. It's a mighty lucky thing for you that he happens to be with this band now. It's going to save you from a terrible death, and nothing else would save you—you can just bank on that."

"Meaning by Nibsin, this Indian here?" asked Ned.

"Meaning nobody else," said the one-eyed man; "but don't you interrupt me, boss. I've risked my life coming down here to talk to you. The Injuns think I'm going to buy you off, and that's why they let me talk."

"I'll pay any amount to get off. Fix it up with them at once."

"Can't be did, boss. The more you was to offer 'em the more they'd want. It ain't no sort of use, and don't you forget it. They'd take every ounce of the gold you've got, and your dogs, and your grub, and all your belongings, and then they'd burn you to the stake to-night at the ghost dance, just the same."

"Good heavens! Is that what they mean to do with us?" gasped Edith, greatly alarmed.

"You ought not to have said it," exclaimed Ned. "Edith, I was keeping that from you."

"Oh, I don't want anything kept from me," said Edith. "If that's what we've got to come to, why, we must make the best of it. Go on, Mr. Butters. I'm wild to hear what you've got to say."

"I wish you would let me say it," replied the one-eyed man. "Now, hold your horses, Young Klondike, for your safety depends upon it, and Nibsin may call me out of here at any moment."

Nibsin growled out something as his name was mentioned. Ben Butters answered him, and then went right on to say:

"These here Injuns all belong to the totem of the bear. Mebbe you don't know what a totem is, so I'll have to tell you that it means a sort of family relation. Some Injuns belong to the crow family, some to the snake family, some to one and some to another, but always named after some bird or animal. Them's what they call totems. These here

Injuns all belong to the totem of the bear, and once a year they have a dance, which they call the 'Great Bear' or ghost dance, and they believe that the spirit of their god takes the form of a bear and comes to them, and besides that they believe that the bear god will be twice as sure to come if they burn a few white men during the dance, and if they burn a white woman he's dead sure to come. So you see where you are at, Young Klondike, and if Nibsin was to guess I was telling you this he would drive a knife into my heart quicker than scat."

"And is that what we've got to face?" groaned Dick.

"That's what it is," replied Butters. "Never you mind. I ain't a-going to desert you, and you needn't worry a bit about the dogs or the gold or none of them things of yourn. They're as safe as though they was in the Bank of California, as far as these Injuns are concerned."

"I wish you'd explain that," said Ned. "I'm ready to face the music, and I know it's a big thing to have you come and tell us all this. We are prepared for the worst now and——"

"Hold up, Young Klondike. Don't you get to talking; if you do we shan't never get through. What's that, Nibsin? I'm most done? Yes, he'll give you all you want."

Butters laughed and winked at Ned as he rattled off a lot of Indian talk to the buck.

"He thinks I'm making a bargain with you," he explained. "You see, boss, they would no more dare to go to our camp than nothing at all, for the place is tabooed, and no Coppermine Indian ever goes nearer to it than Nibsin went last night, when you saw him pass in front of the fire. If we'd have stayed quietly there we would have been perfectly safe."

"By tabooed, you mean they think it's haunted?" asked Dick.

"It amounts to the same thing. I'd have to explain the whole Injun religion to make you understand it just as it is, but they won't go there nohow, and that's right, and all on account of the taboo."

"What's to be done? What's to be done?" broke in Ned, very impatiently, for he was beginning to get tired of Ben Butters' slow way of talking.

"Wait till to-night. We'll show you."

"Meaning you and the Unknown?"

"Yes. I—now, then, Nibsin; now, then, keep your shirt on. I'm most through the palaver, old man."

But Nibsin had grown very impatient at so much talk in words that he could not comprehend.

"Heap talk! Heap talk!" he growled, catching Butters by the arm and dragging him out of the tepee.

And Butters could not help himself.

"Don't despair. We'll be with you on time!" he called back, and then he vanished with his story but half told.

CHAPTER X.

THE GREAT GHOST DANCE.

For nearly two hours Young Klondike and his fellow prisoners were left alone in the tepee.

This gave them plenty of time to talk over the remark-

able visit of Ben Butters, but this did not serve to brighten up the situation any.

The fact was the situation was about as black as it could be.

The only thing that brightened it in the least was the perfect faith they felt in the Unknown's shrewdness.

"He'll get us out of this snap somehow," declared Ned. "You may be sure it was he who sent Butters down here when he found out that he could come safely."

"Do you suppose Butters has gone back to camp again?" asked Edith.

"I'm very sure he has. From what he says there ain't much doubt of it.

Ned hit it off right. Butters had gone back to the camp.

He had humbugged the Indians into believing that he was working entirely in their interest.

Many of them knew him well, and Ben Butters had no difficulty in making the bucks believe that he would harness the dogs and drive all Young Klondike's possessions, the million in gold and all the rest of it, down into the hollow as soon as the ghost dance began.

But this Young Klondike did not know until later on.

It was nearly six o'clock when the turn in Young Klondike's affairs, so long watched for, at last came.

Faint from hunger and almost perishing with cold, our prisoners sat there on the snow, tied to the stakes of the tepee in a pretty despairing frame of mind, when all at once a strain of wild music was heard outside, and into the tepee came bursting three or four big bucks, very much under the influence of firewater.

They slapped Ned and Dick familiarly on the back and kept nodding and smiling at Edith, while they untied their bonds.

Comashee was not with them. Ned tried several on English, but nobody seemed to speak it, or if any did they would not own up.

There was nothing to do but to take things as they came, and Ned tried to put on as smiling a face as possible, laughing when the Indians laughed, and making friendly signs.

This was while they were being led up out of the second hollow into the first, where the stake had been driven, followed by the whole Indian band, dogs and all.

Ned now realized how mistaken he had been in ever supposing that this was a cache.

He saw that the object in building the fire was simply to clear away the snow to give the Indians a chance for the great dance to which Ben Butters had alluded.

If Ned had only known more about the Indians of Alaska he would have understood that this was the famous ghost dance of the Coppermines.

There are many families or clans among the Coppermine Indians.

Each is named after some bird or animal, forming a clan or totem, as Ben Butters had tried to explain.

The totem of this clan was that of Hoorts, the great bear, and this was the annual dance in honor of the bear god.

On this occasion the Indians, after filling themselves up with a kind of native gin, distilled from the juniper berries which grow everywhere here, indulge in a sumptuous feast, and then the dancing begins.

Prisoners to be burned as a sacrifice to the bear god are always made guests of the feast.

All this Ned did not understand, nor were Dick and Edith any better posted.

So when they were given places around the hollow in the snow, where great pieces of roasted meat were placed, all hot and steaming, on wooden platters, they fancied a change for the better had come.

There was no reason why they should not have been thus deceived. They were handed pieces of meat by nearly every Indian in the party, and they did their best not to offend by refusing to at least taste them, although it would have been quite impossible to have eaten half of what was given.

Ned did all he could to make himself agreeable. It didn't work, though. The Indians would not have it so.

Even Comashee refused to talk, so they at last dropped into silence and listened to the Indians as they rattled away to each other, receiving the bones and pieces of meat, tasting them and flinging them over their shoulders—it was all they could do.

"What on earth does all this mean?" Dick whispered to Ned at last. "Do you think there is any truth in what Ben Butters said?"

"About the sacrifice?"

"Yes."

"I thought so before Butters ever said it. I think so still."

"But would they feed us up this way if they meant to kill us?"

"Why not? It may be part of their ceremony."

"A confoundedly uncomfortable ceremony, then. We are full now. If we could only make a break."

"Dick, are you mad? It would mean sure death. They'd be down on us before we'd gone a hundred yards. I tell you, there's no use thinking of it. We've got to take our chances and trust to the Unknown."

"I do trust him. He has never failed us yet, and I don't believe he is going to do it now."

"Right. Look at Edith. How quietly she takes it all."

Edith sat on the opposite side of the fire among the women, where she was receiving the same treatment as Ned and Dick.

At last the feast was over, and Comashee arose and made a long speech, of which the boys, of course, could not understand a single word.

All listened attentively, and when the big buck had finished speaking they broke out into a wild shout, and all springing up, made a rush for the place where the snow had been burned off, the location of the supposed cache.

Around this an immense pile of dry brush wood had been collected. Ned saw this, and felt a thrill of horror as three stakes were driven into the ground under the bed of coals, which had been left smouldering.

Around these stakes stones were piled, which held them firm and kept the fire from reaching them.

The critical moment had almost come.

It was of no use now for the prisoners to think of escaping, for each was held by two bucks, who stood watching all these preparations in grim silence.

The next proceeding was another speech, and a very long one, by the buck who had come into the tepee with Ben Butters.

When it was over all the Indians set up a series of diabolical howls and fiendish yells, and forming a ring, began a mad dance around the stakes and the prisoners, who still remained standing with their guards, not daring to move.

Suddenly the clouds broke and the moon came out in all her glory. Young Klondike saw that the shadow of a large fir tree on the other side of the hollow was thrown right across the line of the stakes.

The Indians now formed themselves in a row along the line of the shadow, and falling on their knees bent their heads down until they touched it. Then, springing up again, they formed their line around the stakes, and remained motionless.

The time had come. Ned, Dick and Edith were led up to the stakes and all three were firmly tied.

Around them the brushwood was piled, all the Indians lending a hand to the work.

As stick after stick was thrown down Young Klondike's spirits sank lower and lower.

It began to look as if help was not going to come.

Then the great ghost dance began.

By the light of the moon the Indians commenced a wild dance around their prisoners, shouting and gesticulating and working themselves up into a perfect frenzy, until some fell down unconscious, foaming at the mouth and acting like persons in epileptic fits.

Still the mad dance was kept up by the others and every now and then all eyes would be turned toward the long shadow cast by the fir tree.

They seemed to be expecting to see some ghostly appearance in that direction.

Ned thought of what Ben Butters had said about the spirit of the Hoorts, the great bear.

Of course he knew little of the traditions and customs of these Coppermine Indians or he would have understood all the tricks of the wily medicine man and have known that one of them with a bearskin thrown over his shoulders and the bear's head drawn down over his face would be pretty certain to appear at the base of the long shadow at the proper time.

But Ned was thinking of everything but this. His thoughts were of the old times in New York, of his journey to the Klondike and his wonderful success at gold digging.

He expected to die—yes, fully expected it. There seemed to be no hope of rescue—no possible chance of escape.

Of what use was all the gold now? Cheerfully Ned would have exchanged the million he was guarding on this fearful journey to Juneau for his own life or for Edith's or Dick's, for it is only just to Young Klondike to say that he thought more for the safety of his companions than for himself.

"Look, look!" whispered Dick, suddenly. "Look, Edith! Look, Ned! Look over by the fir tree."

Hoorts was coming.

Ned could see a bear standing on his hind legs walking slowly toward them, with his forepaws outstretched over the snow.

CHAPTER XI.

THE NICK NIVENS GANG AGAIN.

The moment the Indians caught sight of the bear a great shout went up.

Instantly a dozen flaming torches were applied to the boughs piled around the stakes.

"Too late for help now," gasped Edith. "Good-by, Ned—good-by, Dick!"

The brave girl spoke as calmly as though she was about to start off on some ordinary pleasure trip.

Ned was too much overcome to speak at all; poor Dick stood there, white-faced and silent, too.

The flames crackled, the smoke rose around them. Through it Ned could see that the Indians had fallen on their faces in a half-circle around the burning pile. Men, women and children all took this position, their heads touching the ground, and beyond the circle, still following the line of the shadow of the fir tree, Ned could see the bear advancing with giant strides.

There was a moment of anxious suspense and the bear came up to the burning pile.

"Heavens! We are saved!" gasped Ned. "Look, Dick! Look, Edith! See the boots!"

Who could mistake the Unknown's boots?

Not Ned—not Dick—surely not Edith! There they were under the bearskin.

Stepping right over the burning rim of brushwood, the detective was at Young Klondike's side.

"Don't say a word, don't make a sound," he whispered. "Just follow me!"

He drew a knife from under the bearskin and cut Ned free from the stake. The kneeling Indians set up a wild, unearthly song, but they never changed their positions or opened their eyes.

Poor, superstitious creatures! They believed it would be death to look at Hoorts, the bear god, and it was just this superstition which saved Young Klondike and his friends.

Seizing the knife from the detective, Ned cut Dick free and Dick did the same for Edith.

"Follow me," breathed the Unknown, "but on your life don't attempt to run or show the least haste."

He stepped over the burning brush and passed out of the smoke.

Ned, Dick and Edith followed.

Looking back Ned felt sure that he saw Comashee slightly raise his head and squint one eye at them.

This was all the notice that was taken, however.

The wild song continued.

Hoorts the bear, alias the Unknown, led his prey along the line of the shadow toward the forest.

As they approached they could see Ben Butters and Charley Coons standing in the shadow of the trees with their rifles raised.

It would have been death to any Indian to have interfered with them then.

As they drew nearer still they saw an Indian tied to a tree. He was a big, burly fellow, with a necklace of bear's claws and teeth hanging about his throat.

"It's the medicine man," said the Unknown as they came within the line of the trees. "We laid for him, and by the Jumping Jeremiah we captured him and I took his place. Ye gods and little fishes, ain't I glad it's all over and you are safe! Remember one thing, Young Klondike, you have Ben Butters to thank for it all."

"Yours truly," said the one-eyed man. "I didn't live two years among the Coppermines for nothing. Run for your lives now! If we can only get on the level ground before they know they've been deceived we are safe!"

And didn't they run? It is safe to say that no one ever covered ground faster in that wild part of the world.

The dog teams were all ready and the instant they reached them all hands took their places and off they flew over the snow-covered surface of Lake Tagish.

"Of course we travel all night," said Edith, as the sled went spinning along over the crust.

"We most certainly do," replied Ned, and then they all fell to discussing their startling adventure.

Ben Butters told how it was part of the programme for the medicine man to carry off the prisoners from the stakes as soon as the fire was lighted, the superstitious Indians believing that the bear god took them to his den far back among the mountains, and there devoured them.

"That's what I was working on all the time," he went on to say. "We laid for the medicine man and got him. In no other way could your lives have been saved."

"Don't you suppose the chiefs know it's all a fake?" asked Ned.

"Why, certainly they do," replied Butters, "but they keep their hold on the tribe by pretending to believe. It wouldn't surprise me a bit if Comashee suspected that our friend the Unknown was not the real medicine man; but even if he did he never would have showed it, he would ten thousand times rather have lost his prisoners than to have exposed his band."

"The red snoozer! By the Jumping Jeremiah, I got the best of him," cried the Unknown. "Of course he suspected me! I saw him raise his head and wink at me, as much as to say, 'Don't give me away and I'll not give you away.' Oh, I was dead on to him, and he was on to me."

They made the nineteen miles over Lake Tagish that night, camping at the beginning of Caribou Crossing to wait for daylight.

Here another delay came. Four of their best dogs were taken sick with some strange distemper.

Charley Coons declared that it came from eating the bark of a certain tree and that the only cure was rest.

Be that as it might, it tied them up all that day and the next night at the crossing.

On the following day the dogs seemed somewhat better, and they started on slowly.

The delay had accomplished one good result. Provisions, which had been short, were now plenty, for Edith killed a moose and Ned shot a caribou.

Besides this, Dick bagged two white Arctic foxes, whose fur is so valuable. These were carefully preserved to make a muff for Edith when they should reach Juneau.

That day it was the Caribou Crossing, two miles, and

the length of Lake Bennett, twenty-four miles, and up the river, one mile, to the foot of Lake Linderman.

They were now within a day's journey of Dyea, and if the clear, cold weather would only hold until they could cross the mountains by the dreaded Chilkoot Pass the success of Young Klondike's journey to Juneau was assured.

The dogs were still weak and seemed so much used up by the day's exertions that six o'clock found our friends in camp once more. After supper Edith, Dick and the Unknown went right to sleep, Ned and Ben Butters keeping watch.

The one-eyed man was a very intelligent fellow in many things in spite of his rough ways, and Ned learned a lot about this strange country from him that night.

At one o'clock Butters turned in, and Dick came on guard.

He seemed very sleepy, quite used up in fact, and Ned stayed a while talking with him before arousing the Unknown.

It seemed just no use to try to get Dick wide awake, while Ned, on the contrary, felt as bright as a new dollar.

"Go back to your bearskin, Dick," said Ned at last. "I can put it through all night just as well as not, and tomorrow night you can give me an extra sleep."

Dick demurred at first, but finally yielded, and that was the way it happened that Ned and the Unknown found themselves on guard together for the last half of the night.

They talked over old times, and the hours seemed to fly, for the Unknown was always interesting, especially when he came to talk about his trips through foreign lands.

He told Ned of the most marvelous adventures in the Zulu country, and how he had been shipwrecked on the African coast.

"It seems to me you ought to write a book about all that," said Ned. "If I was in your place I would."

The Unknown gave one of his chuckling laughs.

"I'd do it if it wasn't for just one thing, Young Klondike," he said.

"Which is what?"

"I'd have to give my name."

"Ishaw! As though that would trouble you! Haven't you given a dozen false names a week ever since I knew you? Why should you hesitate to put another on the title page of a book?"

"But I would, though."

"Zed, let me ask you one question."

"Ask a hundred, dear boy, if you want to. If I can I'll answer them all."

"Why don't you tell your name?"

"Now, that's a leading question."

"I thought I should strike you hard. Of course, I don't expect an answer."

"Hold on, Young Klondike. You may not expect an answer, but you are going to get it, just the same."

"I'm ready."

"It's a vow."

"I supposed so."

"Yes, it is, Ned. By the Jumping Jeremiah it really is.

I took a vow five long years ago that I never would tell my name until I caught my man."

"Here we are, back at the same old starting point again. Is there really any man?"

"Ye gods and little fishes! Yes! There's one man!" cried the Unknown suddenly, pointing off on the river.

There, near a wooded bluff, around which the river ran, stood the solitary figure of a man.

He was dressed in white fur from head to foot. No eyes less sharp than those of the detective would ever have been able to distinguish him from the snow.

"Who can he be?" exclaimed Ned, for there in that trackless wilderness it was a wonderful thing to see a man thus standing alone under the starlight.

He vanished even as Ned spoke, and once he was gone it was difficult to realize that he had ever been there.

"Who can he be?" exclaimed the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, you have a short memory, Young Klondike! Can you ask it? Have you forgotten the white bearskin? If you have, then I haven't; oh, no!"

"Nick Nivens!" gasped Ned.

"Who else? Let's go and see."

"And leave the camp unguarded?"

"Pshaw! It's safe. He's only the scout. We go toward him and can retreat on the camp mighty sudden if he starts to come."

"Where would you go?"

"Only to the top of the hill. See, we are on high ground here as it is. If we can make the trip up the hill, what's to hinder us from seeing over the bluff?"

The detective hurried off, and Ned followed him.

Of course, the Unknown, who could never be quiet, kept right on talking as they went up the hill.

"That's what all this delay has brought us to, Young Klondike," he declared. "Oh, that's it, and don't you forget it. The Nick Nivens gang have been creeping steadily up on us. What in thunder we are going to do I don't know."

"Fight 'em to the last," said Ned.

"Easier said than done. 'He who fights and runs away may live to fight another day,' it is said; but he who has sick dogs and can't run is pretty sure to drop into the deep, deep soup."

"Right you are! There'll be a way out, though, never you fear."

By this time they had gained the top of the hill.

It was a beautiful night to look off on that moonlight scene.

In that clear, cold atmosphere they could see for an immense distance. At first it was hard to train the eye down to any one given point; but the Unknown was soon able to do it, and he pointed to the bluff.

"That's the place, Young Klondike," he said. "There's where we saw him. Look and tell me what you see there on the other side of the bluff."

"I'll be blest if I can see anything," said Ned.

"Wait. Don't jump at conclusions."

"Hold on; there is something moving and—Great Scott! You are right! It's the Nick Nivens gang again!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIGHT IN THE CHILKOOT PASS.

What Ned saw was three white figures moving about over the snow.

They were men dressed in the skins of polar bears, made into great coats, which, with hoods, covered them from head to foot.

Of course Ned had not forgotten those white coats.

It was beyond all doubt Nick Nivens' gang.

Having his powerful night glass with him, Young Klondike now turned it upon the moving figures.

He was not able to recognize Nivens' face, nor could the Unknown, for the distance was too great; but there could be no doubt that this was the same old gang.

"They've got their dog sleds hidden in there under the bluff somewhere," declared the detective; "and the next thing we shall find is that they've got reinforcements, too. The thing for us to do is to light out as soon as possible. Don't let's lose a minute. They've sized us up and calculate we mean to lie by till morning. That will give their dogs a chance to rest, and you may mark it down with a red mark that they mean to attack us just before we start."

"Who says we can't knock that plan silly," cried Young Klondike. "We'll start right now and give them the slip."

"The first part is all right, but I very much doubt if we can give them the slip," said the detective. "More than likely they've got someone watching us; but never mind. We can only try."

Then they hurried back to camp, reaching it in a few minutes, for they were already half way down the hill.

There was great excitement when Ned aroused the sleepers and told what they had seen.

"I knowed they'd come," said Ben Butters. "I know'd it blamed well; don't you fret yourself, Young Klondike. All the time we've been holding back they've been coming straight on. You're guarding a million of gold, and they haven't forgotten it—no, not much."

"They'll never get it, then!" cried Ned. "Harness up quick, Charley. We'll go out of here kiting. Edith, don't look so solemn. I know you are not afraid."

"Afraid! No, Ned. I'm only tired of all this struggle, that's all."

"And you wish this journey to Juneau was over?"

"I do, most heartily."

"It won't be long, now. Even with our dogs as they are I believe we can distance those fellows. We've got lots to be thankful for. Just think of our escape from the Indians. Think of the elegant weather we've been having. The thermometer has hardly touched zero through it all, and only one snow storm. Suppose we had been treated to a spell of sixty degree weather, then where should we have been?"

"Ned's right," declared Dick. "We are going to pull out of this all straight, too, and whatever happens, Edith, we shall fight for you to the last."

"Ye gods and little fishes!" put in the Unknown. "As though Edith couldn't fight with the best of us?"

"Don't let anybody fret about me?" said Edith lightly. "As long as I have my rifle I don't ask for any more. I think we can hold out against twenty white coats, and if necessary against more."

Now it was just because Young Klondike's party all pulled together so well that they were so strong.

There wasn't a coward among them. Even Charley Coons, although perhaps not so much of a fighter as he might have been, was as brave as a lion; but Charley had all he could do to attend to the dogs.

Soon all was ready, and the start was made under the starlight.

Their road was now the six mile run up Lake Lindeman.

They had scarcely covered the first quarter of a mile when the Unknown, who was riding backward, called attention to the gathering clouds.

"There's going to be a snow storm, as sure as shooting," he declared. "What do you think about it, Charley? Ain't I right?"

"It looks that way," replied Charley Coons. "I only hope it won't catch us in the Chilkoot Pass."

"Our goose is cooked if it does," said Ben Butters gloomily. "Say, Mr. Detective, are you keeping a sharp lookout for them fellers? My eyesight hain't as good as it used to be, and I won't guarantee to see them if they come."

"No to the first and yes to the second," replied the Unknown. "I am keeping a first-class look out and I won't admit that our goose is cooked even if a snow storm does catch us in the Chilkoot—by the Jumping Jeremiah, there they come!"

"Where?" cried Ned. "I don't see anybody."

"Look sharp, dear boy! Get the sand out of your eyes. I say there they come."

"I see them!" cried Edith.

"So do I," said Dick, pointing. "Catch that line of trees with your eyes, Ned, and you'll spot them. There, do you see?"

"I do! There's two sled loads of them."

"Right you are," said the Unknown quietly, "and right I was. They've been reinforced."

"Wa'al, neow, there's more or less toughs scattered all along the line," drawled Butters. "From the talk I heard them make, I felt afraid of this. You know I told you so, Mr. Detective, and I don't often go wrong."

As they flew on they continued to watch their pursuers with intense interest.

As near as Ned could make out, there were twenty of them, ten on each sled.

Their dogs seemed to be in first-class condition.

Slowly but surely they were gaining on the Klondikers. It was only a question of time when there would have to be a fight.

"Faster! Faster, Charley!" cried Ned. "Make those dogs hook it ahead even if you kill them."

"The more haste the less speed, boss," replied Charley. "I'm getting the best time possible out of them as it is, and I'll be blamed if I can do any more."

Still Charley cracked his whip and did get a little better speed out of his dogs.

As the morning wore on they seemed to hold their own. The length of Lake Linderman was covered, and the ascent of the mountains began.

Now the scene was strangely altered. The last stage of the journey to Juneau had begun. Our Klondikers were on the ascent of the dreaded Chilkoot Pass.

From this point it was eight miles and a half to the summit.

A terrible climb at all times of year, the Chilkoot Pass in winter is something to be dreaded beyond measure; but our party were more than favored as far as the weather and the conditions of the trail was concerned.

The snow had formed a firm, hard crust over which the dogs were able to pull the heavily loaded sleds with perfect ease.

Still it was hard climbing for all that, and to follow the windings of the trail in and out among the great ledges of rock was often difficult and at all times dangerous.

Of course the enemy was now entirely lost sight of.

They were still a good mile and a half behind—perhaps a little more.

Young Klondike still had strong hopes that they would be able to make the summit of the pass. Here there was a relay house where they had stopped and had a battle with the Indians on their journey to the Klondike.

Ned thought it quite possible that they might meet a party there on their way to Forty Mile or Dawson City with a load of provisions. Even if it was not so, the relay house could furnish some protection, as the walls were pierced with portholes for rifles. A few determined fighters could hold the relay house against a small army for a long time.

"Look sharp to your trail now, Charley," said Young Klondike. "Don't you lead us off into some blind trap."

The warning was needed, for the trail up this side of the Chilkoot Pass is particularly blind at all times—especially in winter. There are rocks here and rocks there, with various passes in between them. A mistake might be fatal; but Charley Coons was supposed to know.

For the first three miles up the mountain all went smoothly enough.

They were now fairly in the pass and making as good time as could be expected, when all at once the two foremost dogs, who had been showing no particular signs of fatigue, stopped and lay down.

In a moment all the rest were in confusion. It took all Charley Coons could do to quiet them.

The Unknown, who was driving the provision sled, stopped his team and all got off and gathered around the dead dogs.

"It's no use, they're played," said Charley. "They'll never pull this load no further unless we let 'em rest."

Here was trouble No. 1, and trouble No. 2 quickly followed.

Suddenly the sun was obscured, the gathering clouds were sweeping over the entire sky.

"That means bad business," said Ben Butters. "There's going to be a snow squall, sure."

This was really serious business. Hundreds of lives had

been lost in these dreadful snow squalls which swoop suddenly down upon the Chilkoot Pass.

It was decided to let the dogs rest for half an hour; but before the time was up the squall struck them.

All in a moment the air was thick with whirling flakes, and just at that unfortunate juncture the two sleds of the Nick Nivens' gang were seen coming up the slope.

"There they come! We've got to make a stand for it!" cried Ned. "Charley, how about the dogs?"

"Blame it all, we can try them, boss!" cried Charley cracking his whip.

The dogs responded, and seeing that they were again in shape to start all hands jumped upon the sleds.

Through the whirl of snow Nick Nivens saw them at it. Instantly a dozen or more rifle shots came whizzing toward them.

"Duck! Duck!" yelled the Unknown, and duck they did and just in time, and then up again, and Edith, Ned, Dick and Ben Butters sent shots flying back, but the snow had so closed in upon them that no damage was done.

On they flew, and then another accident happened. Confused by the snow, Charley Coons took the wrong turning, and without knowing it they drove the sleds into one of the blind leads between the cliffs which make the Chilkoot Pass so dangerous.

"Surrender, there! Surrender! We are going to run you down and annihilate you!" a man could be heard shouting behind them.

"That's Nick Nivens, gol bust him!" said Butters. "Here goes for another shot!"

Edith, Ned and Charley did the same.

A loud yelping behind them was the answer. One of the dogs had been hit; they could hear Nivens and his men swearing; but it was impossible to tell if the progress of the sleds had been checked.

"Hit 'em again!" cried the Unknown. "Let 'em have another dose!"

They fired again, being all on the rear sled now in order to lighten up Charley's load, and before the echo of the shots had died away a louder yelping broke out.

"Another dog done," chuckled the Unknown. "By the Jumping Jeremiah, we'll kill them off dog by dog unless—whoa! Whoa! Stop there, you blame brutes! Whoa!"

It was too late! A fearful mistake had been made.

Right ahead there was a descent of fully fifteen feet, and over it Charley Coons had driven his dogs with the heavy sled loaded down with the gold, and the Unknown, unable to stop his team, went down, too!

Carelessness, of course; it was nothing else. Charley Coons ought to have looked sharper, and he deserved a worse fate than overtook him.

The speed with which he drove over caused the sled to keep its upright position, and down it went without overturning; but the dogs came down all in a heap and such a yelping you never heard.

Unable to stop his team, the Unknown drove over, too, and managed to tumble off in the going. He broke through

the crust, and, sinking in the drift, was buried up to the neck.

The sled was overturned, but Young Klondike, Dick, Edith and Ben Butters managed to keep on top of the crust.

It was well that they did, for Nick Nivens' sled was close upon them.

Nick saw his danger, and, standing up on the sled, pulled the dogs with all his might.

The two leaders went over and hung down over the bluff.

"Cover them!" cried Young Klondike.

Up went the rifles.

"Stay where you are!" shouted Edith. "Stay where you are or we fire!"

It was doubtful if Nick Nivens could obey the command. He had all he could do to hold his dogs.

"You gol-busted snoozers! You've got to surrender!" he yelled. Shoot 'em down, boys! Let 'em have it. We want that million in gold!"

"Get it if you can!" cried Young Klondike. "Fire! Give it to them if they don't go back!"

The rifles spoke then on both sides.

It was the final struggle.

Two more dogs were shot, Nick Nivens fell wounded, but the shots of the toughs did no harm.

Realizing their perilous position, and seeing their leader fall, the toughs picked him up and retreated to a safe distance.

This gave Young Klondike just the breathing spell he needed.

He and Dick pulled the Unknown out of the drift and the sled was righted.

It took a moment to get the dogs right in line, and then down the hill they flew.

"I know the way, now!" cried Charley Coons. "I've been caught in this trap before."

Reaching the bottom of the slope, he turned and was soon in the main pass, and the ascent begun again.

Here they fully expected to hear more of Nivens and his gang, but they didn't.

Whether the leader of the outlaws was killed or not Young Klondike never knew.

Certain it is that they saw no more of the toughs, and in due time they reached the relay house, where they passed a watchful night, but were not disturbed.

The storm cleared away a little after sundown, and next morning early the journey to Juneau was resumed.

The descent out of the Chilkoot Pass was easily accomplished, and in due time our friends reached Dyea, and from there went on to Juneau, where they arrived safe and sound.

When they drove up in front of Miller & McKinnon's Hotel people came running from all sides to see them.

They could scarcely believe that Young Klondike and his party had driven down from Dawson City, for never before had a woman attempted the terrible winter journey to Juneau.

Thus Edith became the lion of the town, so to speak, and when the people discovered that the famous Young Klondike was among them and had brought down a million from the diggings, their excitement knew no bounds.

Ned bore his honors meekly, and while pleasant and cordial to all he told his business to none.

As it seemed hardly worth while to brave the dangers of the return journey until spring, Ned proposed that they take the gold down to San Francisco themselves.

To this all hands agreed, and they shipped it in the steamer Abyssinian, and after as pleasant a voyage as could be expected at that season of the year, sailed safely through the Golden Gate.

In San Francisco Young Klondike found himself even greater lion than he had been in Juneau, but he could not rest long there, for his interests in the Yukon country were far too great.

So early spring found Ned again ready to return to the Klondike, where he met with a series of adventures even more startling than any through which he had yet passed.

Dick, Edith and the Unknown went with him, and the next story of this series, entitled "Young Klondiker's Lucky Camp; or, Working the Unknown's Claim," will tell of their further doings in the land of gold.

THE END.

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